



GILGAMESH

A Journal of Modern Iraqi Arts



I - 1987



A Pioneer Role

Naji Al-Hadithi

Since time immemorial, Iraq has maintained a pioneer role in initiating new cultural ideals and establishing civilised norms of life in various fields. Such a role, which rarely has any country played in the world, has been frequently turning this country into a centre of enlightenment, knowledge and regional power. The Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian, Assyrian and Islamic eras had seen great strides in Iraqi contribution to human civilisation in science, law, administration, town planning, arts, industry, etc.

However, this pioneer role which disappeared for over eight centuries under the colonial domination of various barbarian and retarded groups and states, started to emerge albeit with great difficulty, slowly in certain fields.

In the 1940s and 1950s of this century Iraq pioneered in the field of literature with a prominent poet, Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab, who established a pioneering role in modern Arab poetry. At the same time Iraq was moving firmly along the path of establishing an art movement which was to be later the most prominent in the Arab world.

Some works by Al-Sayyab and co-pioneer Nazik Al-Mala'ika are translated and presented in this issue together with certain notes by the Iraqi pioneer artist Jewad Selim. This issue also deals with another issue of arts inter-relations, with an article on the relation between pioneer poet Al-Sayyab and pioneer artist Selim

It is Iraq's persistent desire to resume and deepen its pioneer role in all civilised fields which makes Iraq a target for the most viciously retrogressive drive in this century, namely Iran's frantic campaign to impose its backward style of life under Khomeini on neighbours. It is also this long established pioneer role in contribution to human civilisation that inspires the Iraqis to stand fast against this campaign and to crush it.

Published by Dar al-Ma'mun for Translation and Publishing
Ministry of Information and Culture, Karradat Mariam, Baghdad - Iraq.
P.O. Box 24015, Tel.: 5383171, Telex: 212984 MAMUN IK.

Front cover : Dia al Azzawi, Arabic Motif 1984, mixed media, 93 x 70 cms.

Back cover : Abdul Ridha Bahiyya, Kufic Script.

Inside front cover: A stone head from the city of Assur

Inside back cover: Detail from Arbil Castle

Poetry and short story drawings by Ali Talib.

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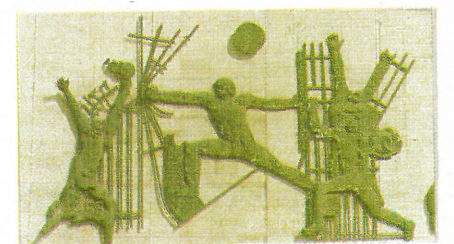
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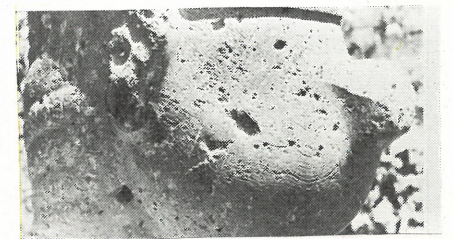
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The Monument of Liberty is a major landmark in the centre of Baghdad. It is the masterpiece of pioneer Iraqi artist Jewad Selim who tried to commemorate the July 14, 1958 Revolution in Iraq through an epic-like work of art which tells the story of the Revolution. Art critic Jabra I. Jabra describes the circumstances which surrounded Selim's work on this Monument and how its idea came about.



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In June 1982 while clearing up debris beneath the Assur temple, archaeologists found a stone head which they call the Assur Head. No firm indication of its date has been found yet, but it is obvious that the statue is a fine work of art made by a skilled craftsman. Dr. Abu Al-Soof tries to establish the whereabouts of the Assur Head in the light of information available.



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What are the essential characteristics of Baghdad? The rich history of Baghdad throughout ages has left its marks on every aspect of life in the city including its architecture. New styles and methods began to appear with the beginning of the century. Iraqi architects have made valuable contributions to create a distinguished style in the 1960s. Could Baghdad, once again, set the pace and quality of architecture in the Arab World?



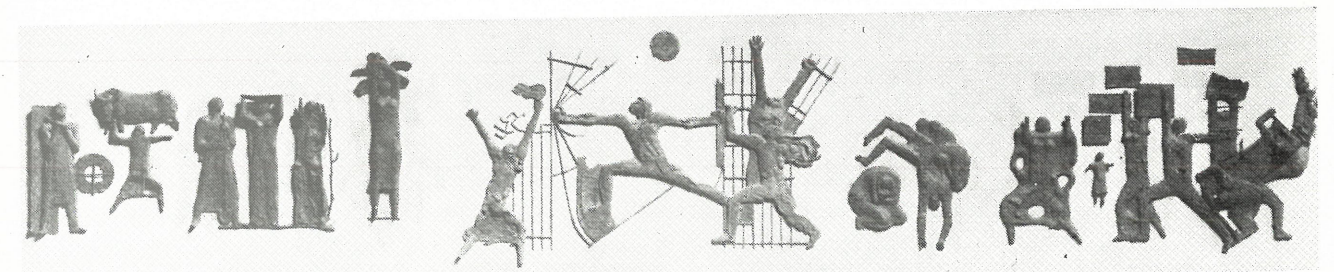
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In what has become an annual gathering of poets and men of letters from many parts of the world more than 500 poets and 200 critics took part in the 7th Al-Mirbad Poetry Festival which was held in Baghdad from November 22 to December 1, 1986. It has been decided during this Festival that as from the next festival a number of valuable prizes would be awarded to three Arab innovators in poetry, fiction and topics related to literature in general.



The Crowning Achievement of Jewad Selim The Monument of Liberty

Jabra I. Jabra



A model of the Monument in 1959. Later the artist introduced many changes into the left side of the Monument.

Love, pain, fury and pity fused in Jewad Selim's personal experience. This was creatively demonstrated by his paintings and sculpture which he finally crowned with a distinguished work — the Monument of Liberty. It was the culmination of years of artistic search and originality.

Almost each component of the Liberty Monument had its antecedents in the concepts and experiments which had occupied Selim's mind for nearly fifteen years before he started working on the Monument. He managed, in a mere few weeks in early 1959, to make the maquette of the Monument in plasticene. He had reached that point of maturity when an artist knows exactly what he wants of his art: he knows what is essence and what is accident, what is to be kept and what is to be rejected.

"I have tried hard to forget what I have learnt," Selim once said in April 1958. "Today, there are innumerable influences one should be aware of so that one may know what to take and reject the rest."

"Big issues," he added, "whether social, political or humanistic, cannot make great or genuine art unless the artist himself has the stature to interpret them. Guernica is a masterpiece not because the town itself was bombed, but because it was Picasso's

art that made it."

Selim was aware of his strength, highly confident of his stature. He waited for the right moment when he could deal with a great subject worthy of his powers. Before the July 14, 1958 Revolution, Selim's work in sculpture was very little. He often contemplated what an artist could actually do for Iraq. He knew if an artist embarked on a big work he had to be supported by the State. But this might also mean that certain themes or limitations, unacceptable to the artist, could be imposed on him. Except for the Sumerian era when art was almost an interpretation of an artist's personal vision, sculpture in ancient Iraq was characterized by massiveness and awe, depicting power, glorifying the king and exalting might. It was a ceremonial art demanding skill and talent; thus diminishing the artist's own personality.

It seems that Selim was more attracted by the attitude of the ancient Sumerian artist whose work might be characterized by crudity, but also by freedom of expression and vision. But the gigantic size of Assyrian sculptures had always appealed to him. He hoped he could make his voice heard through a tragic theme which would make him part of a huge work assigned to him by the State. In this



The Mother and her Child

context he said, "art in Mesopotamia has always been like its people, who have been the product of the land and climate. They have never reached decadence and never achieved perfection; for them perfection of craftsmanship has been a limitation of their self-expression. Their work has been crude but inventive, has had a vigour and boldness which would not have been possible with a more refined technique. The artist has always been free to express himself, even amid the state art of Assyria, where the true artist speaks through the drama of the wounded beast."

In saying this, Selim, no doubt, tried to reconcile two opposites, though we cannot quite agree with him that Iraqi art never reached perfection or refined technique. This can be said of Sumerian art which avoided massiveness and remained within the bounds of a close relationship between the artist and his own private vision. Assyrian art was entirely different in matters of technique and perfection. More significant, however, is to look for the Assyrian artist himself in what he produced. Selim was right in seeing the true artist "even amid the state art of Assyria..." (speaking) through the drama of the wounded lioness in the astounding drama chiseled in the famous bas-relief which shows the king of Nineveh, Ashurbanipal (seventh century B.C.) hunting lions: what eye, what hand, what chisel could so amazingly work together to create this sculpture? We shall here forget the daring king and his steel chariots, his feathered horses and his deadly arrows. As we concentrate on the dead lions strewn all over the place and the wounded lioness helplessly craning her neck, fighting and rejecting the death planted in her sides and back by the royal arrows shot at her, we find ourselves in the middle of a tragedy. We shall not then think only of the king's might but of the opposing force challenging him. We then give in to the artist's wish whose talent is focussed on the will to survive as depicted by the

wounded beast. He made each muscle tense with the rejection of death. We share in the artist's sense of tragedy and his celebration of life.

And Jewad Selim celebrated life. He loved his country, his people and all that they did. He also loved everything—in fact, everyone he saw. His strong love for women and children was vividly expressed in his paintings and sculptures. It was an expression of his celebration of life and of the makers of life in his homeland.

Such love was inevitably accompanied by a sense of tragedy whenever he thought of his people's suffering and oppression. He portrayed disease and poverty in many of his paintings. Injustice and deprivation of political freedom demanded by every Iraqi citizen generation after generation were also illustrated in his works. People's aspirations were great; and the greater they became, the greater became the people's sense of repression. People had to be unchained. Uprisings became a commonplace. As a result, there were victims. Intellectuals were jailed.

Then came the July 14 Revolution. There had been a sweeping feeling among artists and the public that new horizons suddenly opened up before them. There was a feeling of rapture in freedom, in the faith that there would be no more jails. Everyone was free now to fulfil himself, to serve his country the way he deemed best.

Amid this ecstasy of freedom, Selim felt that it was high time his dream came true. A few months after the Revolution, government officials commissioned him to design a monument for the Revolution to be erected in *Tahreer* (Liberation) Square, the largest in Baghdad. He was given total freedom to express himself, a demand which he feared he would be denied by the State. He was given full freedom to choose his theme and to fashion it in the form he wanted—and the government would finance its execution.

He thought of the many details of his work and

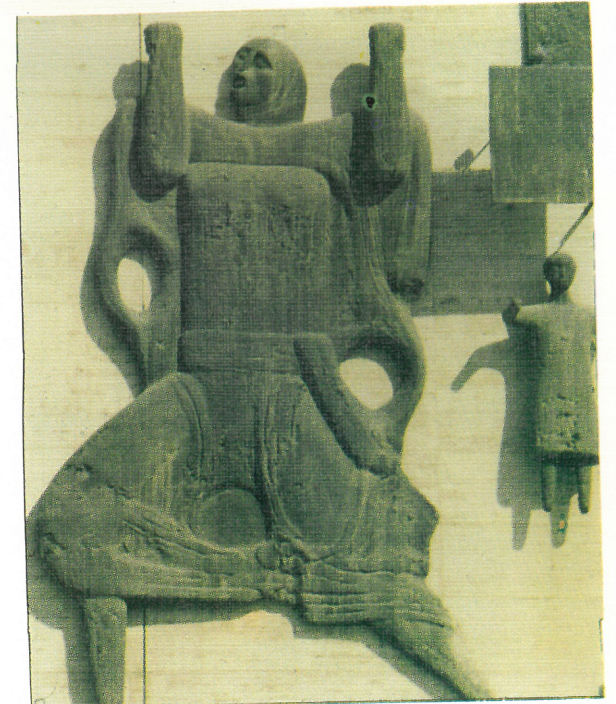


The Horse

when and how to start it. He would make of it a drama or an epic which spoke for himself as well as the people. He would give a final embodiment to his theories regarding style—which would be Arab, Iraqi and modern, all together. He had to achieve a compromise between his own need and that of the State, his own aspirations and those of the people, and crystallize his sense of time and place, of past and future. He would express the "sublime noble idea" (of which he had spoken in his youth) in a manner that would embody the hope of a nation as well as his own genius.

First, he had to decide the dimensions of the project and its form. Was it going to be in round sculpture or relief...? Much of what he decided was done in consultation with the architect Rif'at Chaderji who designed a 50 x 10 metre frieze rising some six metres above the ground. The structure then would look like an ancient Assyrian gate. It would be an entrance to a new public garden replacing an old one. It was to be called *Al-Umma* (The Nation's) Park (also designed by Rif'at Chaderji). The architect deliberately designed the gate to be long and horizontal with minimal surface lines so that attention would be centred not on the structure but on the artist's work. Chaderji says that the idea of the frieze occurred to him when he saw the banners raised daily by demonstrators in support of the Revolution. "Let's make a banner, which will remain hoisted for ever!" he said to Jewad Selim.

The idea appealed to the artist who was reminded by it of the impressions of Sumerian cylinder seals. And soon Selim made up his mind to make the monument in low relief: a dominant characteristic of Mesopotamian art. Iraqi artists from the earliest times and until the end of the Abbasid era had expressed themselves in relief and lives and carving on flat surfaces, unlike European artists who sought



The Crying Woman

expression usually in round sculpture.

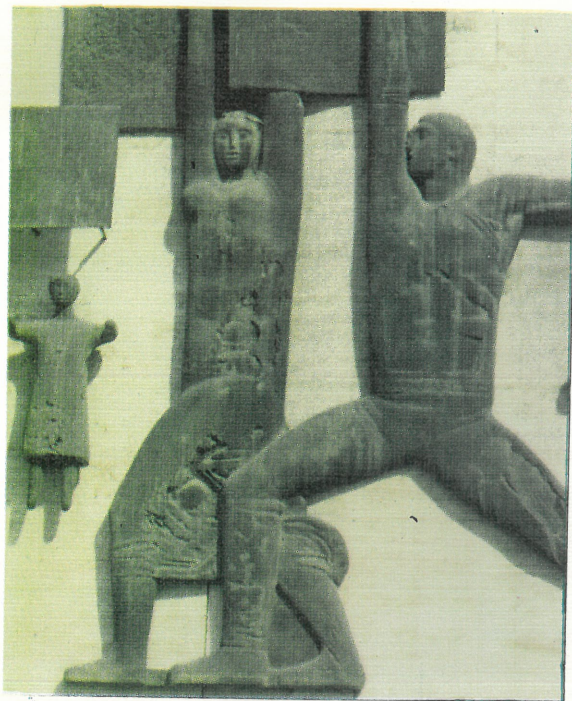
Before leaving for Florence in March 1959 to make the Monument, Selim showed the government officials in Baghdad no sketches or maquettes of it except for the central part, which shows the "leap of the soldier" and the bearer of the torch of liberty. The officials had absolute confidence in him and his art.

When in Florence, Selim started to draw the first sketches of the Monument. He wanted so eagerly to include many of the symbols he had thought of in his earlier years but never had the chance or the means to put them into bronze. He found he could have fourteen separate units in the Monument. The number stood for the date of the eruption of the Revolution: "Fourteen" had become a sacred figure. Besides, it is double the figure seven which had always been of symbolic significance since ancient times.

As the details of the sketches emerged gradually, Selim, perhaps subconsciously, could see the frieze, in its miniature, like a tablet on which he inscribed Arabic words. The shapes of the figures, seen from a distance, looked like Arabic calligraphy beautifully proportioned and interrelated.

The result was that the figure units were so arranged from right to left that they could be "read" like a line of Arabic poetry. Each unit was a self-sufficient concept, and yet each one was so linked to the next as to form the complete meaning of the Monument; Iraq's desire for liberty since the dawn of history and the sacrifices made for its realization. With liberty then come peace, prosperity and creativity. The Revolution was for freedom, and freedom released the country's creative potentials.

In his early days in Florence, Selim was very happy to be working on the sketches of the



The Pioneers of the Revolution



The Martyr,

Monument. For years he had devoted most of his time to painting rather than sculpture. Now his dammed up sculpture energy seemed to be exploding like a gusher and assume the shapes of bronze figures. But his natural bias for painting, which he had once resisted, took hold of him again. In style, the Monument in its over-all look, was nearer to a painter's rather than a sculptor's style. But whereas Selim's painting had tended generally to be static, he had brought movement into it in his later years. It was this movement which he now introduced into the configuration of the total frieze. This sense of movement was a departure, however small, from the ancient Mesopotamian styles wherein he had always sought his inspiration. Nevertheless, it distinguished Selim's work from the sculpture of contemporary artists, such as Henry Moore, from whom he had learnt a lot. He thus confirmed the uniqueness of his own style and vision. He was deliberate in avoiding abstract art, because he was intent on providing an explicit "humanistic" expression of his powerful emotions. His was no simple aesthetic issue: it was a drama with tension and tragedy, resolved finally in a profound peace.

He remained emotionally tense throughout, until the maquette was completed in a studio in Florence, where he stayed with his wife and two daughters. He then started to work in clay the details of the figures.

It was a joy for Selim to be in Florence the hometown of Giotto, Brunelleschi, Ghiberti and Michelangelo. He spent many hours visiting its churches and museums, studying its masterpieces of sculpture and architecture, and feeling that he was in his work carrying on with the tradition of those great masters. He was helped by his former student Muhammad Ghani who was then studying sculpture in Rome.

The first figure of the Monument was completed.

It was the bearer of the torch — liberty. It was cast in bronze in Pistoia and sent over to Baghdad in mid 1959. It was soon fixed on the marble frieze, which had been built by that time, waiting for the bronzes to arrive.

Meanwhile, the artist was going through mounting tensions, which caused him suspicion and anxiety, and sometimes despair. News from Baghdad came, upsetting him, making him spend nights sleepless and worried. However, he was determined to finish his undertaking no matter what happened. Moreover, he had doubts concerning his work: did his sculptures have a unity of style, or were they actually 'eclectic'?

His uncertainty and psychological stress disturbed him deeply, as they had done once or twice before, until he broke down completely. As a result he was unable to continue his work and had to spend three months in a sanitarium in Florence.

With the help of doctors and the encouragement of his friends, especially Rif'at Chadirji and Mohammad Ghani, he recovered his mental stability and emotional control. And in no time he went back to his work with high spirits and added joy and confidence.

It is almost certain that a monument made up of fourteen separate units and comprising twenty-five human figures together with a horse and a bull would have taken any sculptor five or six years to finish. Yet Selim completed it in one and a half years, against the payment of a measly three-thousand Iraqi dinars. But, for Selim, it had been a commitment: he was determined against all odds to finish it before the third anniversary of the Revolution in 1961.

He worked feverishly throughout 1960 on the clay figures. He sent them to Pistoia to be cast in bronze. Each figure was divided into parts in order to

facilitate their shipment to Baghdad in carefully marked crates.

Late that year, Selim returned to Baghdad to supervise the installation of the figures on the completed frieze.

In Baghdad, the bronze pieces were taken out of the wooden crates welded together and raised on to the marble structure.

Selim never stopped supervising the work being done properly. He was always on site, together with his colleagues and a crowd of curious people watching the gradual unfolding of the dramatic figures.

He was busy supervising the erection of the second unit when he had a heart attack. He was hurried to hospital. Around his bed gathered the best doctors in town trying to help him pull through. But the attack was so severe that he died on January 23, 1961, not yet 42.

His death was mourned by the whole of Baghdad — the city he had loved. The installation of the figures continued according to plan, and the whole work was over as scheduled. The Monument was unveiled on July 16, 1961.

Translated by Afaf I. Ali



The Tigris and the Euphrates

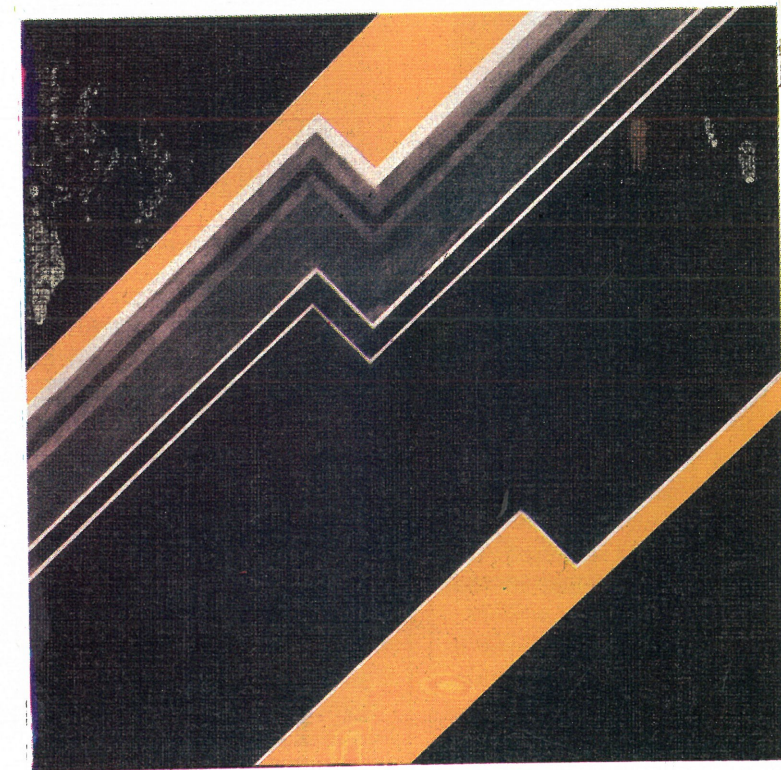
Jewad Selim

- Born in 1920 in Ankara, Turkey.
- Studied sculpture in Paris 1938-1939, in Rome 1939-1940 and in London 1946-1949.
- Formed the Baghdad Modern Art Group in 1951.
- Became head of the Sculpture Department at the Fine Arts Institute until 1961.
- Designed the *Monument of Liberty* in bronze, standing in the centre of Baghdad.
- A founding member of the Iraqi Artists Society, he is considered a pioneer of Iraqi modern art.
- Died in January 1961.



Modern Iraqi Graphic Art

Rafa Al-Nasiri



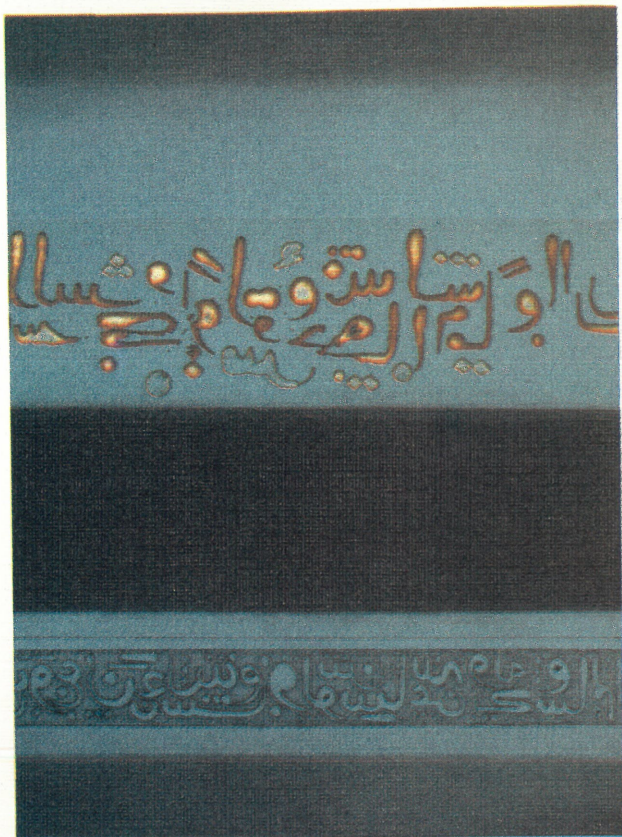
Hashim Samarchi 1968

It has been said that history began at Sumer, that small kingdom of the Lower Tigris-Euphrates valley which gave us during its more than two thousand years of existence many of the ideas, institutions and inventions on which our civilization is based. The Sumerians perfected a system of writing on clay. They knew how to solder and rivet, to engrave and carve on stone. Sumer was united with other scattered realms by the Babylonians, who were conquered in turn by the Assyrians. These and later overlords absorbed their predecessors' inventions and skills which then spread rapidly through Asia Minor and westward to the Aegean.

The Mesopotamians came very close to the

invention of printing. Their magnificent seals, carved cylinders of Lapis Lazuli, alabaster, steatite, limestone and other materials, were run off into wet clay on jars and tablets, leaving the imprint of ownership, rank and authority. Rolled over ink and printed on papyrus, vellum or textile, they would have approximated the principle of printing on the offset or rotary press as know it today¹

Thus ancient Iraqis were the first to know the art of printing in history; and practising this art continued on and off along generations until we recognised another printing medium which was later applied in the southern parts of Iraq and in the holy cities such as Kerbala for instance, where woodcut



Rafa Al-Nasiri 1981

has been used to be imprinted on textiles for special religious occasions. These prints included poetic verses counting the epic of Al-Hussein's² martyrdom which is usually printed in black and white with a length measuring more than ten metres. They are used for decorative purpose on such occasions. Other patterns are also applied, in different sizes, representing mosques, arabesque and scattered Arabic words printed on coloured woodcuts, in red, black and green.

The printing technique, therefore, remained limited to this function and its folkloric craftsmanship. It neither developed its artistic motives nor its use of simple material, otherwise it would have established a folkloric graphic art similar to the Chinese Guardian Dogs which is also used for religious celebrations such as the Chinese new year. It would have also followed the same woodcut technique but enriched with colours, objects and lines though executed by popular craftsmen.

Modern graphic art was not introduced in Iraq until the 1940s where a number of pioneer artists studied the method during their academic courses in Europe. They brought back with them some printing techniques (etching, lithographs and woodcuts) which were done as part of their courses in Paris, London and Rome. Undoubtedly, those works were simply academic because graphic was introduced in those courses only as a complementary subject to accomplish their technical know-how. Therefore, those artists did neither bother to pay any attention to this art, nor to convey its knowledge to their



Dia Al-Azzawi 1978

students. This was due, perhaps, partly to their limited experience in this field and partly to their deep involvement in developing the basis of their own craftsmanship in painting and sculpture.

Twenty years passed and no influence of graphic art was traced whether in the artists' own work or the technical know-how in the art milieu least of all among students. It was not until 1959/1960 that the management of the Institute of Fine Arts decided to benefit from foreign expertise and introduce graphic courses and mural work in an attempt to expand the scope of painting courses. A contract, therefore, was signed with the well-known Polish painter and print maker Roman Artimovsky to teach graphic art as a subsidiary lesson to painting. Artimovsky established a small atelier with quite an old printing machine for etchings and another one for lithographs together with some other principal material such as limestone. All those materials were imported.

After a short time a higher department was initiated to be later called "The Academy of Fine Arts" (1962). Soon afterwards the graphic atelier was moved to the premises of the Academy. Many gifted students showed quite an interest in these courses, students such as Hashim Samarchi, Salim al-Dabbagh, Yehya al-Sheikh and Mehdi Mutashar who became the first professional print makers as we shall later see in the article.

By mid 1960s, the production of this small atelier began to show its yield. In 1965 an exhibition of prints was held at the National Gallery of Modern



Salih Al-Jumai'e 1977

Art showing a collection of Iraqi woodcuts, etchings and lithographs. The exhibition was later moved to the National Gallery of Arts in East Berlin. This was not only the first Iraqi print exhibition ever held abroad, but one of the first Iraqi collective exhibitions showing abroad.³ Contemporary Iraqi graphic art, therefore, began actually in 1965 as the preceding years were simply preparatory and dedicated to establish and develop its basics. In that particular year, and in addition to the collective exhibition mentioned earlier, prints began to appear generally in collective exhibitions. In his one man show, held in the same year at Al-Wasiti Art Gallery⁴ Kadhim Hayder exhibited a number of prints (etchings, lithographs and monotypes) together with his oil paintings. The late artist executed those prints during his study in London.

Mohammed Mahr-el-Din, soon afterwards, held his one-man show at IA gallery⁵ showing a collection of graphic works which the artist did during his stay in Warsaw where he was studying painting and graphic. In 1965, also after those two exhibitions I held my own one-man show with a collection of woodcut prints which I had already brought back from Peking where I spent four years studying and specializing in graphic art at the Central Academy of Peking. My exhibition was held at the Czechoslovak Cultural Centre in Baghdad. The prints were partly in black and white and partly in colours using water-colour, a technique quite characteristic in Chinese art.



Hashim Al-Taweel 1981

During the second half of the 1960s graphic works were seen in collective exhibitions as well as one-man shows in an increasing quantity. In 1967 three artists were nominated by the Iraqi Artists' Society to enjoy a two-year scholarship granted by the Gulbenkian Foundation to Portugal for a training course at the Gravura Atelier in Lisbon. In two years time the three specialised artists came back with more advanced experience, to hold three graphic exhibitions showing modern compositions in etching and lithographs. The three exhibitions were held in 1969 respectively by Hashim Samarchi at IA Gallery, Rafa Nasiri at the gallery of the Iraqi Artists Society and the third was held jointly at the same gallery by Salim al-Dabbagh and Rakan Dabdoub. The three artists, namely Samarchi, Nasiri and Dabbagh, agree to show together in Beirut at Gallery One during the Summer of 1969.

We may therefore say that Iraqi graphic art, began to develop its features professionally and advance towards a mature stage. It even crossed out the border towards other Arab cities and began to take part in international graphic exhibitions. The three above-mentioned artists showed at the International Liege Graphic Biennale in Belgium in 1969. That was followed by a number of individual contributions in various international exhibitions such as Ljubiliana (Yugoslavia), Krakow (Poland), Friedrichstad (Norway), Bradford (England), Berlin (GDR) and others in 1969 and onward.

In the meantime graphic educational programme went steadily. At the Academy of Fine Arts Ghalib



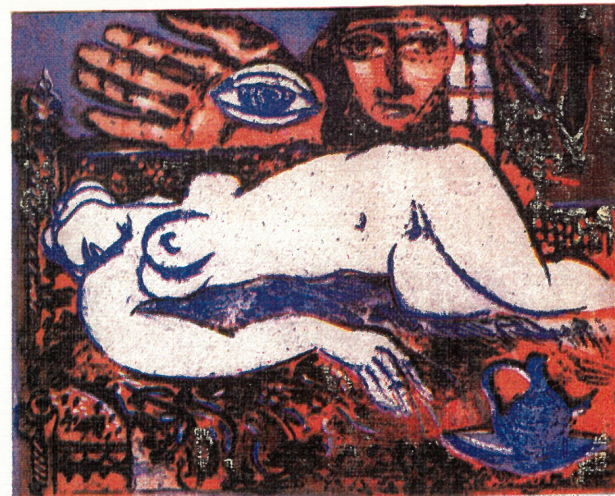
Suad Al-Attar 1977

Nahi took over the graphic courses after Artimovsky whose contract ended in 1968. At the Institute of Fine Arts graphic had been taught as a subject subsidiary to painting as I used to give lectures on graphic techniques since my return from China in 1963. It was not until 1974 that I was able to establish an independent department for graphic arts which I am still running with my colleagues first Sami Haqqi who came at that time from West Germany and then Salim al-Dabbagh who is still working at the department.

During the first half of the 1970s a group of Iraqi artists began to return home after having specialized in graphic arts. Artists such as Yehya al-Sheikh came back from Yugoslavia and held his first one-man show in 1972 at the National Museum for Modern Art, Baghdad. Sami Haqqi returned from West Germany and held his exhibition at the same gallery; later on Mehdi Mutashar held his one-man show exhibiting a collection on silk screens which he had executed in France. Other Iraqi print-maker., living abroad, came to hold exhibitions in Baghdad in the mid 1970s such as Faik Hassan who lived in Madrid and Ardash Kakavian who is still living in France.

In 1975 two well-known painters, Dhia al-Azzawi and Saleh al-Jumaie joined the Summer Academy at Salzburg (Austria) to practise graphic art in an attempt to expand the scope of their artistic know-how. The two artists were essentially influenced by the New Vision manifests⁶ which declared that Iraqi art was in need of new expressive means and ideas.

That was the beginning of future projects and joint experiences for both Al-Azzawi and Al-Jumaie. Jumaie went further in developing his knowledge where he joined a two year course in the United States of America, and so did Al-Azzawi who is now a permanent resident in London. He has been developing his artistic tools since he first arrived in London in 1976. Al-Jumaie held a one-man show following his return to Baghdad and so did the well-known painter Su'ad al-Attar who also studied



Sami Haqqi 1978

graphic in London and held a one-person show of her works. Al-Azzawi also took part in several collective and one-man exhibitions, showing a number of his prints. We saw another exhibition of graphic works held by Hashim al-Taweel who studied in the U.S.A.

Students began to show an increasing interest in studying graphic now that the Institute opened a special department well equipped with means and materials and supervised by qualified teachers.

Graduates of these classes turned later to become well established young artists, competent in both painting and graphic techniques. Some of them even took part in international graphic exhibitions in Baghdad, London, Norway, Yugoslavia, Poland and South Korea. Among those artists were Hamid Abdul Hussein, Ammar Salman, Hayan Abdul Jabbar, Mudhir Ahmed, Samir Usama, Nadhim Muhsin, Yunis al-Azzawi and others.

Later, Iraq's participation in international graphic exhibitions increased enormously. Prints by Iraqi artists were shown at the Indian Triennale, Ankara Biennale, Cairo Biennale, Cuba Biennale and others.

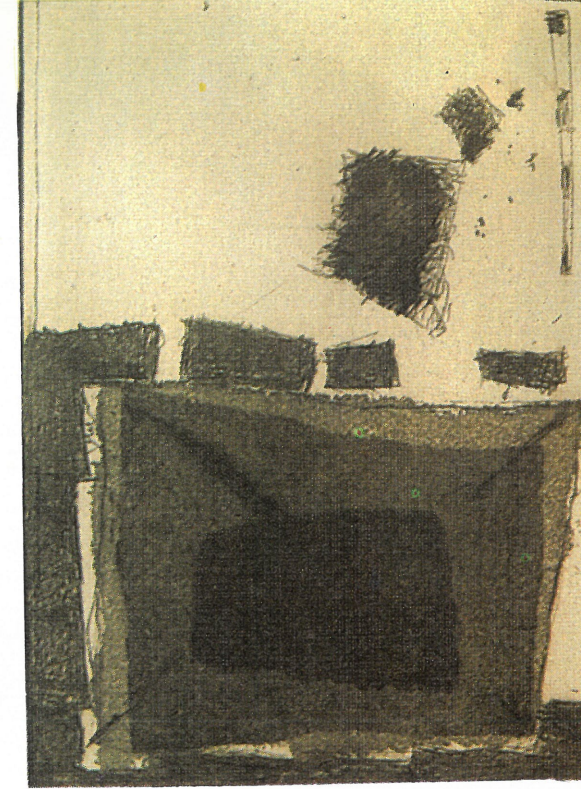
In 1978 the Iraqi Cultural Centre in London organised and sponsored the Arab Graphic Exhibition in which a selected group of Arab artists took part. The exhibition took place in London and Baghdad. In 1980 the exhibition expanded to become a graphic Biennale for the Third World. Special regulations and awards were set and the jury members were carefully selected. Many well known artists took part in the exhibition. According to Matta, this gathering of artists was realized to enable artists of the Third World "confront their struggle and search for a culture that could become the third eye" a reference to the conflicts sure to drive their history between the other two worlds⁷. The idea of the two exhibitions was suggested and engineered by Dhia al-Azzawi who has been collaborating with the Iraqi Cultural Centre in London.



Usam Al-Sa'eed 1977

Finally I would mention quite an interesting graphic experience. The International Miniature Print Biennale in Seoul (South Korea) extended an invitation for Iraqi printmakers to take part in 1985.

Ten Iraqi printmakers of different generations took



Salim Al-Dabbagh 1984

part introducing 35 prints. Editions of those miniature works were also exhibited at Orfali⁸ Art Gallery, Baghdad, in the same year. Five more artists took part showing 120 prints.

Translated by May Mudhaffar

Notes

- 1 The Art of the Print - Fritz Eichenberg - Thames and Hudson - p.24.
- 2 The Grand-son of Prophet Mohammed who was massacred with his family in Kerbala (1st Hijra Century).
- 3 Funoun Arabiya - a quarterly Arab Review - Contemporary Arab Graphic Art by Rafa Nasiri - (No. 1-1981), London.
- 4 Al-Wasiti Art Gallery was the first private gallery to be opened in Baghdad by a group of Iraqi architects.
- 5 IA is another private gallery which was established nearly in the same period also by an architect.

- 6 The New Vision: A group of artists namely: Dhia al-Azzawi, Rafa Nasiri, Saleh al-Jumaie, Hashim Samarchi, Ismail Fattah and Mohammed Mahr-el-Din, signed in 1969 a manifesto declaring the need of avant-garde work and new daring ideas based on modern aesthetic values and adhered to the human cause. They held collective exhibition but four of them including Fattah and Mahr-el-Din never showed with the group.

- 7 Matta: Statement by the Jury - Third World Biennale of Graphic Art 1980 - Iraqi Cultural Centre, London.

- 8 A private gallery opened in 1983.

Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab

My Grandfather's House

Extinguished are the numerous windows
And latched is my grandfather's door and awaiting in his house.
I knock, who will answer, who will open the door?
Childhood answers, Youth since it came about,
The jars answer, having dried up, they no longer ooze:
"Buwaib"* answers, but now it sprinkles only dust.
Extinguished are the suns in it and the stars.
The three decades since I throbbed to life
In my grandfather's house, crowded in it like clouds
In whose fringes waters are epitomized and seas
We do not take cognizance of death from graves,
For the faces of old women
Are more eloquent in talking about the scythes of time
When houses are devoid of their builders
And their inhabitants, of their songs and their complaints,
We sense how time crushes as it turns.

* * *

Do I desire you, oh stones of the wall, oh tiles, oh iron, oh paint?
Do I desire meeting you as it came about to me?
Or is it youth, my youth and my playful childhood and happiness?
Have I wept that the building is falling apart
And the court is depopulated, or have I wept its inhabitants?
Or have I seen annihilation in your ruin
Gazing at me from you, from my blood

Badr Shakir al-Sayyab

Born in Jaikour, Basra, 1925.

Graduate of the Higher Teachers' Training College, Baghdad, Dept. of English, 1947.

Published the following collections of poems:

Withered Flowers, Legends, Song of the Rain, Drowned Temple, Women Slave House.

Died on Christmas Eve, 1964.

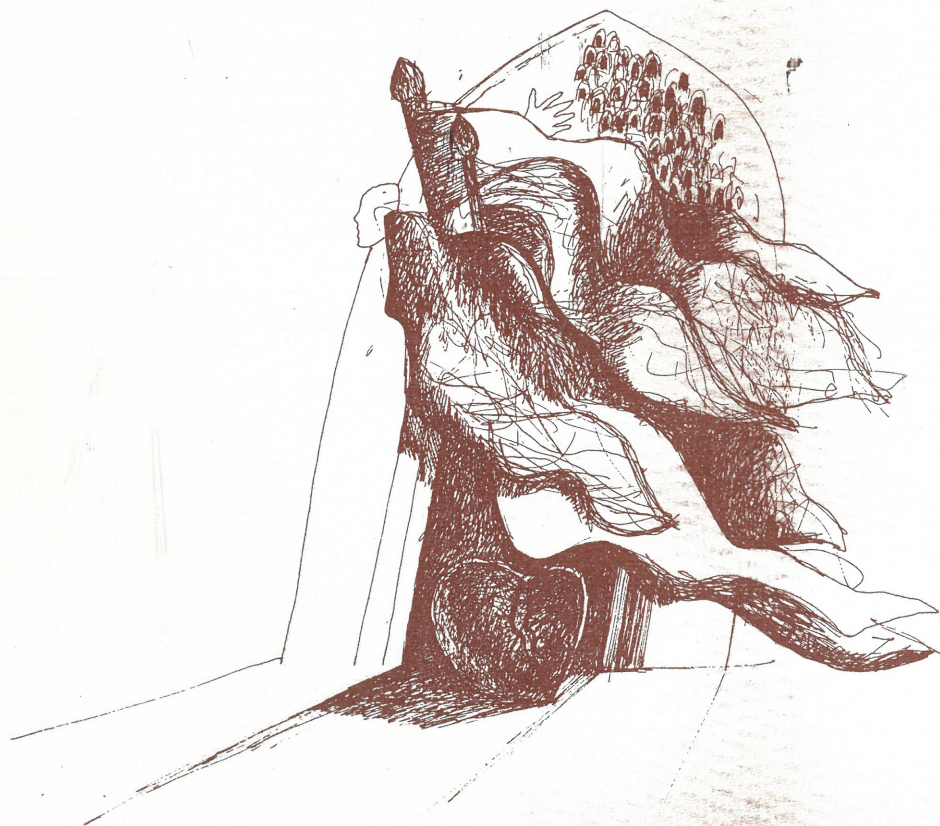
Grinning from stone? Ah, what bud
Is sprouting up in you? The bud of death!! Tomorrow I will die,
And of my faculties will not remain that which remains of the ruins of a house:
I will not inhale the light, I will not bite at the air,
I will not press the day out, or be sucked up by the night.

* * *

As if my eyeballs, rather, as if I was Orpheus revived,
Sucked down by the low ruins to Hell
To meet with his eyeballs, to meet with her, with Eurydice:
"Oh bride! Twin of youth! Lily of Paradise!"
He paved his road with yearning and with song:
The buds of immortality opened for him the locks of death.
And with song, oh my youth, my bones, my decay,
I clothed you with beauty and light.

* * *

My childhood, my youth, where...where are they all?
Where is life whose long road is not confined by a fence
That reveals in a grin a gate like the eyes of a window
Leading to the graves?
The universe is throbbing with life: waters and rocks,
An atom of dust, ants and iron,
And every song, every season, all new:
Ploughing, Sowing, and blooms.
Each that laughs laughs from the heart, each that speaks speaks from the heart
Each that weeps weeps from the heart. And earth ceases to turn
And the sun, as it sets, rests like a baby in sleep.



A man does not die unless a wolf devours him in the dark,
Or a giant snatches him away, and a man does not grow white-haired
(The aged are thus since they were born:
The white hair, the walking stick, and the beards).

* * *

And in the summer nights when the moon gets drowsy
And the stars faint in the beginning of dawn,
I wake up to gather dew from the trees
In a cup, to kill coughing and leanness.
And in the evening I bathe with the stars,
My eyes pick them a star after a star, and I board the crescent
As a ship, as if I were Sinbad voyaging:
The clouds for my sail
And the impossible for my port,
And I see God in the shape of a date-palm
As a crown of a date-palm getting white in the dark.
I sense Him saying: "My son, oh boy,
I gave you life and compassion. And the stars
I gave to your eyes, and the rain
To the tender feet. Drink life,
And gulp it down, the Lord will love you then"

* * *

Is this how the years pass?
Is this how life seeps away?
I feel I am melting, I tire,
I die like trees.

Translated by Dr. Salman Al-Wasiti

* A brook in the poet's village.

Town Without Rain

The night of our town is sleepless with a flameless fire
Fevered are the town's roads and houses, then passes the heat
And the town is by sunset dyed, with all its burden of clouds
A spark may flare, and rise would all its dead

“He woke from his clay sleep under canopies of vine,
Tammuz woke up, returned to Babylon the green, to tend”

The drums in Babylon would beat, and then the town is haunted
By whistling wind in its towers, and the moaning of the sick
In the chambers of Ishtar
The clay fire-pots lie void of fire,
And supplications rise, as if all throats of reeds
Would in the marshes cry:
“panting with fatigue
Returns the goddess of blood, the Bread of Babylon, the sun of March.
And we, like strangers, flock from door to door
Begging for her gifts.
Hungry are we.. Alas, empty her hands,
Cruel her eyes,
Cold as gold.
Clouds of thunder and lightning, never rain.
We spent year after year after year in tending her.
A wind like a storm, but unlike a storm it passed,
Nor calming down- we sleep and wake afraid.
O Lords, onlooking mercilessly,
Your stone eyes we feel in darkness roll
To stone us without spite,
Rolling like slow mills, chewing our eyelids, till that familiar grew
Your stone eyes, like bricks in walls,
With our hands, with what no hands can do, we built them.
Our maidens sad and stunned, round Ishtar stand,
Little by little withers her face,
Branch by branch withers the vine,
Slow is our death, creeping between light and dark.
Woe be to him! What a lion, whose toothless jaw we face!
Is it lightning in his eyes or a flame from the temple?
Or windows of that darkened world,
Where every year carries his fiery wound,
The wound of the revolving world, its redeemer

And saviour: who every year returns with flowers
And rain - His hands wound us to awaken to his gifts?
But the years went by, numerous to the count,
Without rain - not even a drop!
Without flowers not even one!
Without fruit - as if our barren palms were monuments we raised
That we may wither beneath them and so die,

Our Lord deserted us, O, his grave!
Is there no jar in your depth of clay?
Does it not hold remains of the Lord's blood..or seed?
His little gardens we devoured of late, as we starved:
From the ant-mounds, from their stores we stole oats and rye,
And chaff we sowed,
So we fulfilled our vows, but he did not.

Then went the children of Babylon, with cactus baskets
And fruit of clay, offerings to Ishtar.
A flash of lightning burns,
By the shadow of water, greenery and fire,
Their little faces round, for rain imploring.
And at their glimmer a field of blossoms is about to bloom,
And flutters, like a thousand butterflies swarming the horizon,
Their little chant:

“The graves of our brothers call.
Our hands are searching for you,
As fear fills up our hearts, the winds of March
Rock our cradles, we fear. The voices call.
Hungry are we, shivering in the dark,
Searching for a hand to feed us at night, to cover us in bed,
To close our restless eyes-for a naked arm.
And in the darkness we search for you, for breasts, a nipple!
O you whose chest is the wide horizon, her breast the cloud,
you heard our sobbing, and saw us die..

So, give us to drink.
We die, and you, alas, are cruel, you have no mercy.
O Fathers, who shall redeem us? Who shall revive?
And who shall die, to offer his body for us?

The sky lightened, as if a hyacinth of fire
Over Babylon opened, and glimmered all the dale
And seeped through all our land a glow to expose
Its seeds, its roots, and all its dead.
Beyond what Babylon raised, and round its fever
And thirsty soil, of columns and of walls
The clouds poured out, and could, but for these walls refresh the thirst.
By an eternal listening, between a thunderbolt and bolt
We heard, not rustling of the palm beneath the drenching rain
Or what the wind has whispered where the canopies are wet,
But heard a throbbing of feet and hands,

A giggle and an "Ah" of a little girl, her right hand holding
 A moon aflutter like a butterfly, a star,
 A gift of the cloud,
 A quivering of water, a drop the breeze has whispered
 To say that Babylon of its sins shall be cleansed.

Translated by Dr. A.W. Lu'lu'a



Nazik al-Mala'ika

The String Tied to a Cypress Tree

1

In the blackness of the darkened street and silence deaf,
 Where there is no colour but that of thickening night,
 Where the oleander bushes spread their grief
 A shadow over the face of earth,
 A tale was told me by a voice which vanished soon
 Its lips disappearing in the night.

2

A tale of the love which your heart thinks dead,
 But which is still a sprout and life;
 Soon will yearning press you on to me,
 And you shall call me and be tired.
 Memory will on your chest push down
 A weight of madness, then will you nothing touch;
 Not anything, a dream, a gentle word,
 Not anything. The road will call you
 And you shall wake.
 The night will see you on the road alone
 Asking the distant past
 To come back.
 The dreaming street and oleander will see you walking
 Your eyes coloured with agitation and joy

Nazik al-Mala'ika

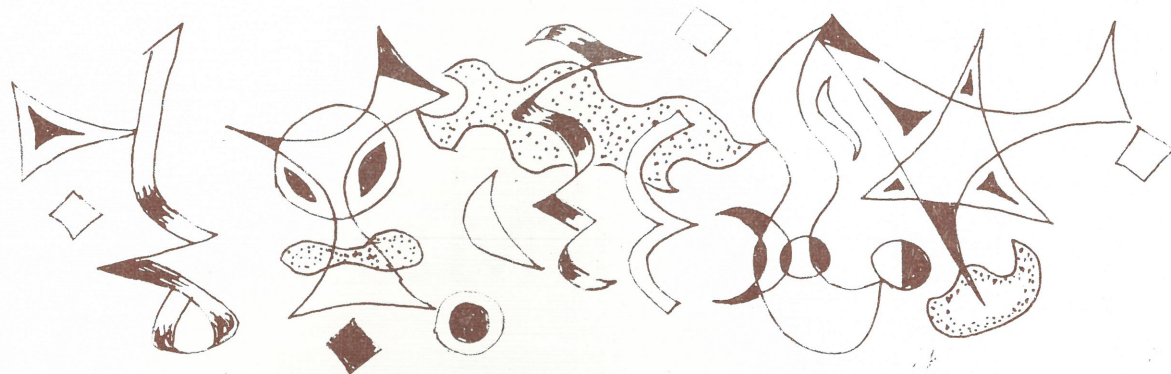
Born in Baghdad, 1923.

Graduate of the Higher Teachers' Training College, Baghdad, Dept. of Arabic 1943.

Published the following collections of poems:

Lover of the Night, Sparks and Ashes, Moon Tree, Bottom of the Wave, Colours of the Sea.

She has been teaching at Kuwait University since 1969.



A drawing by Shakir Hassan Al-Saeed

Your face with love and emotion
All that hides your depth is painted there.
And I myself can see you
From my dark and distant place
Can see the happy dream
Behind your eyes, calling me, dejected,
And you see the house at last
Our house where we met.
When our love was a misled child:
Its colour on our lips,
Its quivering youth in our hands.

3

You see the house and for a moment you are motionless:
"Here is the house as it used to be, there
Still shadowed by oleander, and over it
Bend bitter oranges and luscious cypress
And here our seat..."

What do I feel?
Confusion in my depths, and whisper
A warning challenging my dream.
Perhaps she was! But why my fear?
She still does keep our bond of love
She still is kind and tender, still,
And as of old will meet and welcome
Will meet me..."

Calm and sure you walk
In the dark and quiet passage, sneering
At the inner call warning of a false delusion:
"Here I come of all sins clear,
Here I see, your eyes are peeping
From behind that door, perhaps, or hidden by a shadow

Here I come back, here the stairs
And there the dark tanned door, so why stay back?
A moment, then I see her
A moment, then her footfalls there.
So come what may...I'll knock at the door..." The moments pass
Then squeaks the door with heavy notes
You see a pale face in the dark hallway
Stiff, reflects a setting shade:
"Is ..."and sadly dies your husky voice
"Don't say she is..."

"O madness!

You dreamer, of whom do you ask?
She died."

Two moments pass
And there you stand as if heard not the startling sound.
Stiff, you eye the place around
Distracted, your sight held to a little string
Tied to the cypress tree you know not when
Or why. It was not there
Two months ago. Your lips would almost
Ask the sister: that little string,
Why did they hang. It? When?

The voice then echoes in your ear: "she died,
She died.." You coldly look
And see the string turn ropes of ice
Made into knots by hands that died and passed
A thousand years ago.
You see the melancholy face
Augmented by the clouds of fear that dim your eyes. "She died.."

4

"She died"? A word without a sense,
An echo of an empty hammer rises up then off it goes,
Its recurrent monotony could mean nothing to you then.
It's the curious string alone which now your eye can there behold.
Was it she who tied it? Here
Again that boring sound is heard.
The sound: she died" does not go down,
It fills the night with cries and clamour.
"She died" is by a whisper echoed,
A call repeated by the night,
Related deeply by the cypress.
Say the storms "she died,"
"She died" is echoed even to the star,
You can almost ringing hear it from beyond the lightning now.

5

"She died" in every place is ringing,
 To the ears of time, a hammer.
 "Died," a suffocating serpent,
 Every letter turned a nerve, panting terror in your chest,
 And the vision of the gallows red and cruel,
 Or the working of a deeply biting paw,
 Or the echo of a husky hellish voice
 Is that hollow hammer: "Died!"
 "Died." The world does no more hold her,
 And you ask the darkness of her all in vain
 And in vain your searching for her in the moon,
 And in vain you dream that one day you will see her
 At a place, except the tunnels of the mind.
 She has vanished far beyond the distant stars.
 She has turned a glimpse, a tinsel in a dream.

6

Here you are then, motionless,
 Tired, almost falling on the passage floor.
 And your restless glance is tied to something there,
 A string a thousand secrets folding, to the cypress tree they tied.
 A curious string
 A dubious riddle
 All your gloomy, withering love has left behind.



7

The night then sees you walking back;
 In your hand the string, the shiver, and the din of droning vein.
 "Died" and then you stray away,
 Fumbling with the string and tying
 It around your thumb. Alone
 The string is what your love has left.
 A string, a saucy word: "She died"
 And all, except that call, is gone!

Translated by Dr. A.W. Lu'lua'a

The Visitor Who Never Came

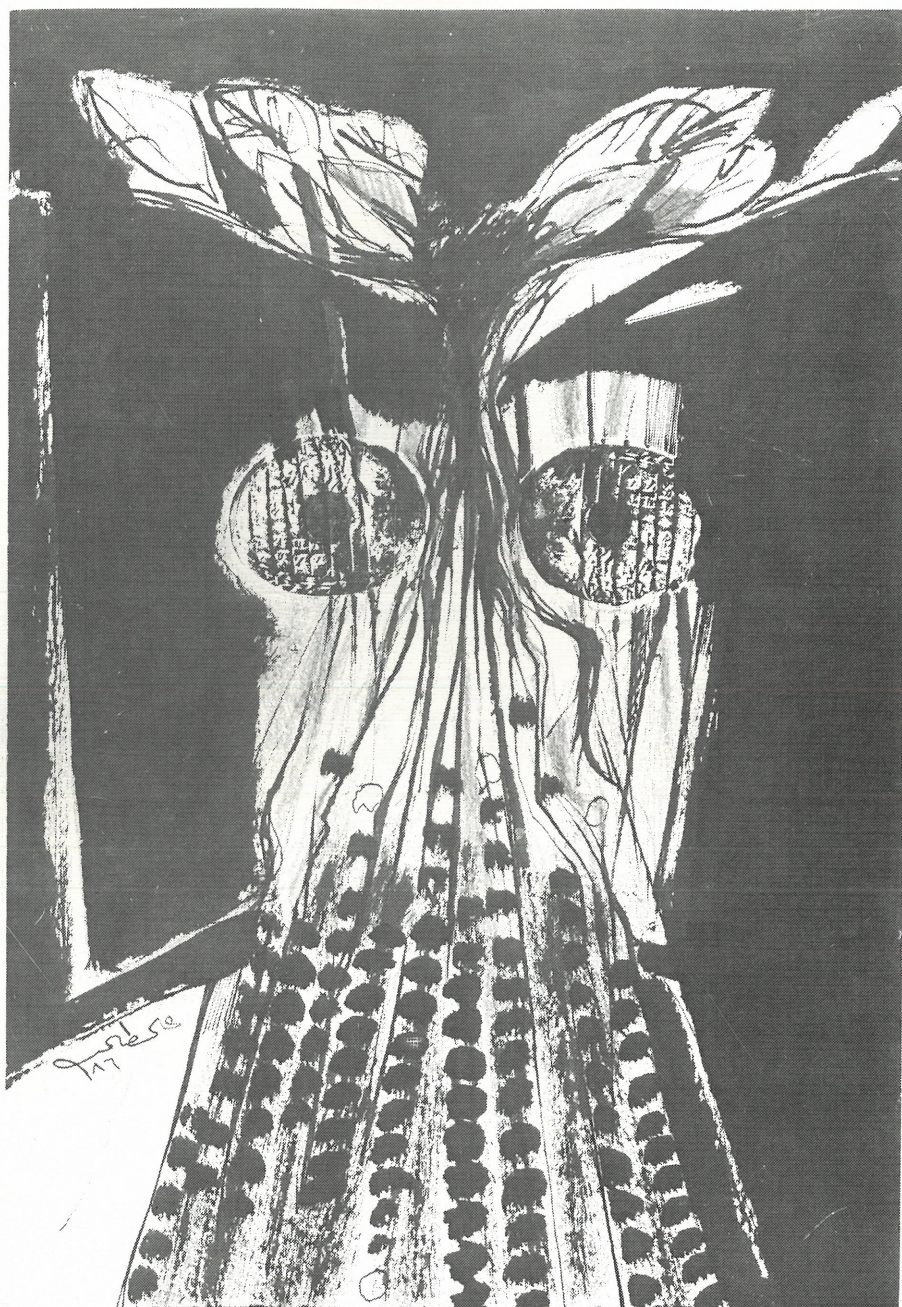
And evening passed, and the moon was about to set,
 And we were about to bid the hours of a second evening adieu
 And witness how happiness was heading for the abyss,
 Yet you never came and were lost with other hopes.
 You left your empty chair
 Conversing with the corner
 And asking aloud for a visitor who never came.

* * *

I never knew that if you withdrew behind the years,
 You would leave your shadow on every utterance and on
 every sense,
 And in every corner of my visions and in every bend;
 I never knew that you are more forceful than all present,
 And that hundreds of visitors
 Are lost in one moment of yearning
 Which ebbs and flows longing for a visitor who never came.

* * *

Had you come, had we sat with the others,
 And had talk flowed in circles, and friends split in small groups,
 Would you not have become like the others, and would the evening
 Not have passed while we turn our eyes in bewilderment
 And ask even the vacancies of chairs



About those who are absent beyond the evenings
And cry that among them we have a visitor who never came?

* * *

And if you were to come one day... I still prefer that you never come...
Then the fragrance of the colourful vacancy in my memories would have dried
And the wings of fancy would have been clipped and my songs depressed
And I would have held the wreckage of my innocent hope in the palm of my hand
And would have realized that I love you as a dream
Now that you have come in flesh and blood,
I will dream of the impossible visitor who never came.

* * *

Translated by: Dr Salman D. Al-Wasiti

Ghazi al-Abadi

Source of Danger

The boy was apparently on his way home after a long day at work. His clothes were filthy and soiled with engines' oil. There was something strange about him. He was not walking like other people do. Rather, he was moving from one side of the road to the other like a pendulum. He was hurrying from this pavement to the other crossing the street paying no attention to the heavy traffic and large number of people toing and froing the sidewalks in the heat of that summer afternoon.

When the man in white elegant suit saw him for the first time he felt uneasy.

He was very irritated. It was very hot. The pavements were crowded and there was an unbroken chain of cars and vehicles moving noisily in the street in both directions. Yet he felt some sympathy for the boy and became concerned about his safety. What if a speeding car hit him while he was crossing the street merrily? What if an irritated bike-rider stepped down and slapped him in the face because the boy was obstructing his way? Other children of this age usually wear white clean sportswear and play in safe playgrounds far from any danger. This boy, he thought, despite his long unpleasant day still had some strength

and energy left. Therefore, he was moving and jumping so actively in the street uninhibited by the movement of cars and people around him.

There was another cause of concern for the elegant man. His white elegant suit. He had just brought it from the laundry that day and he was very careful to keep it clean. In that crowded street with that heavy traffic and in that hot weather, this seemed quite a job.

Now that exuberant thin boy has added to his worries. As he was coming closer, the elegant man became more and more concerned that the boy might in one of his crossings bump into him and smear his suit.

It was however, a short-lived worry, or so it should have been. The boy was so fast in crossing and recrossing the street that the source of danger would be back in seconds either behind him or running ahead.

It was not a long street. The elegant man who was walking extremely cautiously could see the boy crossing the street five times consecutively waiting only a few seconds on each pavement to weigh perhaps the movement of the cars. As he approached the elegant man, the boy hurried thus adding to his irritation because of

Ghazi al-Abadi was born in 1935. His works include: *The Eighth Voyage of Sinbad* (1969), *Smiles for People and Wind* (1970), *Coffee for the Morning Visitor* (1973), *From Tranquility to Silence* (1977).

the heat, dust and the street vendors who were blocking the way.

"Why does he run so fast?" the man wondered. He decided to calculate his steps so that to avoid the boy when he crosses the street towards him. He had a hunch that the boy would eventually collide with him and spoil his white suit. Therefore, when the boy was crossing the street in his direction he would increase the pace of his steps and would continue to do so until the boy re-crosses the street again to the other side. Then and only then he would feel relatively safe.

Yet he continued to chase the boy with his eyes. The boy who was stretching his arms like a bird began to cross the street again heading towards him. He came nearer and nearer until he was only a few steps away. The man did not feel any threat. He was almost certain that the pendulum would again swing away from him. There, it would not matter whether the pendulum stopped

or continued its movement, for by the time it was back the man would have passed the danger zone. With some extra speed he would not be in danger of colliding with him any more. But suddenly something went wrong. The pendulum did not swing to the other side. It remained in its place as if it needed to be rewound or as if a certain magnetic field had left it motionless.

The elegant man gazed at the boy who was now moving closer towards him. The danger was coming his way. He could imagine what it would be like if the boy collided with him and left his indelible marks on his white suit. He felt helpless. How could he prevent him? How can he avoid a disaster? Unconsciously his hand rose high and fell heavily on the boy's cheek who was only a few inches away from him. The boy fell down, his head hit the solid kerb and he rolled in the middle of the street and then rested still. By his skinny body, the traffic came to a halt.

Translated by Hadi Al-Taie



Saad al-Bazzaz

Arnoun

Arnoun is an elevation, in a hump-backed land with terraced surfaces in which deep chasms — some large, some small — are cleft, providing hiding places for snakes and small bears. Deep inside the clefts, a cold black wind blows, while outside the sky of Arnoun is a wide-open space for birds, surrounded by plains, fields, woods and houses. All these gather together and diminish in size as Reem draws them. Her picture is tiny, in keeping with her young age and small stature. Arnoun, drawn on a white sheet of paper, appears on three different planes, a light blue ribbon on the top, the brown of a mountain sloping gradually into foothills in the middle, and finally a strand of greenery, the same width as the blue sky.

Reem finished her drawing and put it up on the wall of the room. Every day, a new picture was added, creating a sense of home for the family. She took a few steps back and looked at her work. For her, the drawing was a concise picture of Arnoun. She sat down next to her grandmother, who was also looking at the picture.

Her fingers stroking Reem's hair, the grandmother murmured: 'Is that really Arnoun?'

Reem got up. 'Yes, that's Arnoun,' she said. The old woman looked first at the red colour of the soil, then at the blue sky and the greenery, then she said: 'Where's our house?'

Reem went to the wall and pointed.

'You can't see our house. It's on the other side of the mountain.'

The old woman shook her head, then took up her place at the hand-loom. The fabric was taking shape beneath her hands. She began work with a speed and elegance that spoke of much practice.

She said to Reem: 'That could be any mountain, Arnoun or any other.'

Reem was annoyed by her grandmother's words. 'No, it is Arnoun,' she shouted.

Her grandmother asked her coolly, while her hands kept weaving: 'Well, how am I to know that mountain is in Lebanon?'

'Oh, I don't know. Perhaps the red clay colour or the blue sky. But I say it is, and I drew it. Isn't that proof enough?', Reem said angrily and got up. That was all she

Saad al-Bazzaz was born in Mosul, Iraq. His first collection of short stories, *Migrations* was published in 1972 in Beirut. *Search of the Sea Birds*, his second collection, was published in Baghdad in 1976. His most recent volume is *The Story of the Girl and the Boy Late in the Night*, Beirut, 1980; *Arnoun* comes from this collection. He spent many years working in the Iraqi Broadcasting Service, and he published a book in this field. He is now Director General of the National House for Publications, Distribution and Advertising.

could put up with. She ran out of the room and threw herself down on her bed, Oh, why did Arnoun appear bare like that, just a blue ribbon, a reddish brown slope and a green border? She wanted to say: 'I don't want to draw the victims' bodies,' but her tears nearly choked her, and she did not want to cry aloud. Instead, she put her head under her pillow.

As soon as Dima and Darina came running in, they clattered past their grandmother, who called out: 'You're like two birds, who don't know how to walk'.

The two little girls did not stop. Darina went to pour some water from a little jug on her face and neck, then she threw off her shoes and followed Dima to the bedroom. They found Reem lying on her bed.

'What's the matter, Reem?' asked Dima.

'Grandma didn't like my picture of Arnoun', said Reem disconsolately.

Darina, the youngest of the three, asked: 'Did you draw it?'

And Dima said: 'How did you draw it?'

'I drew it looking peaceful, no guns no dead people, no people at all, in fact, and no snakes. Just by itself. You'll see it, downstairs,' Reem said.

While little Darina ran to see, Dima began to turn over what Reem had said in her mind. Her face took on a distracted look, and she began to speak as if she were trying to recall a distant scene.

'I saw fire falling on the side of Arnoun. How much fire is needed to burn it?' she asked.

'All hellfire', replied Reem gloomily.

By that time, Darina had got to the living-room and taken the picture down from the wall. She picked up a yellow pencil firmly and angrily, and began to draw a yellow line of fire blazing around the sides of the red, clay slope.

Reem, a pupil in the second intermediate class, Liberty School, Baghdad, was walking beneath the old trees that ran in a line

along the pavement. Her leather satchel, hanging from her shoulder, was swinging to and fro, hitting rhythmically against her back, making her slim body sway as if it wanted to escape. She hesitated a little when a group of boys went past her in the opposite direction. They were looking at her slim body, their attention drawn by the swinging satchel. She walked on demurely, clutching the satchel now between her right arm and her side. Ignoring the boys, she went in through a large iron gate, feeling a tingle of excitement. What was she running away from? And what adventures awaited her in school today? The school bell rang, and the cold morning air brushed her face. She stood with the others, singing a patriotic anthem with fervour, before going in for the first lesson.

As soon as she had sat down, her eyes met the teacher's eyes.

Came the command: 'Read us something, Reem.'

The classroom fell quiet: the other girls were listening. Faces were held between hands and temples sank into palms supported by thin arms. In the midst of them all stood Reem, with her curly hair and dark features. Putting her hands behind her back, she read aloud: 'Before the war, oh Lebanon, you were the fairest of lands. You were like a beautiful white rose and like a shining moon. But now, my beloved country, you have become a sad red rose and a dim moon. Wicked people have snatched you and made you suffer. You are indeed wretched, my homeland. But I will never forget a beloved country called Lebanon.'

Small hands began to clap, clapping harder and harder as if those hands were on fire. Reem's eyes were filled with tears. Her eyes were green, with red specks made shiny by tears. She went back to her place and the clapping stopped.

'Well done, Reem. Now it's the others'

turn', came the teacher's voice.

Reem was surrounded by the compassionate and tearful-eyed girls. They gathered around her in the playground. One of them said to her:

'We love you more when you talk about Lebanon. I've never seen it. Is it like Baghdad?'

Reem answered her, saying: 'I drew it. I draw everything I've seen'.

Another girl asked. 'Did you draw the war? What is a war?'

'Yes, I drew the war'.

'How?'

'Just yellow sands and at the bottom of the picture, drops of blood'.

A girl standing next to Reem asked: 'Was that man who brought you to school your father?'

'Yes, he is my father. Doesn't he look like my father? He doesn't worry about the war,' Reem added. 'In fact, he doesn't even bother about us'.

Another girl asked 'Don't you love him?'

'My uncle doesn't like him', Reem answered. She turned away to face the girl standing next to her, who touched her arm and said:

'The boy you see with me when I got out of school is my brother. He's older than me ...he's asked me about you.'

Reem lowered her eyes. The girl next to her went on: 'My brother says you look like a cat because your eyes are green.'

'I'm sure I look strange. Ever since my mother died, my grandmother's been looking after us, and she says I'm the oddest looking among my sisters', Reem said, sadly.

They were moving about like bees inside the house. They were all female. Little Darina had gathered the hem of her dress and tucked it into her knickers. She was squatting in the corner of the narrow hallway, which had become a laundry room, holding her father's shirt. She sprink-

led washing powder on it and began to rub the grey line of grime which went right round the neckline. She clenched her small fists and put the shirt collar around them, scrubbing it. The collar was quite big. When she had finished the shirt, she had no more dirty clothes left. She looked at herself, put her hands on her knickers and pulled them down over her legs, plunging them into the last of the hot water. Dima's voice was coming from another room, separated by another room and the passageway. She had got used to singing whenever she found herself alone. She had sprinkled the floor with water, wiping it dry with a sponge, which she was moving backwards and forwards on the floor of the room in time with her humming. That was why she had not heard her grandmother calling: 'Have you finished, Dima?'

The grandmother's voice was faint because she never lifted her head from her work on the hand-loom. Her eyeglasses were perched on the tip of her nose. For forty years she had sat like this, but for the past year or so she had been doing it far away from her old home in Arnoun, of which there was now nothing left, but the land on which their house had once stood.

Into all this bustling female activity came the sound of a male footstep. The old woman raised her eyes from the loom and gasped. She pricked her finger with the shuttle, she who had never made such a mistake in forty years. She could not get up, as she had been yearning to do, to kiss him and kiss in him the scent of happier days, the smell of Arnoun. She remained sitting in her cane chair. The tall young man was wearing a short-sleeved cloak. His skin was sun-tanned. He covered the distance between the old woman's chair and the door with a few quick steps. The old woman, his mother, no longer held the shuttle. Her eyes were fixed on him with love. Speechlessly, he encircled his old mother's head,

and his lips, with the thick bushy moustache, bent over her head. They embraced. Her blood-spattered hands clung to her younger son, the shuttle lying on the floor.

Her elder son came in, not noticing his three daughters gathered by the door. He slammed the door behind him shouting at the old woman: 'Have your fill of him. Just two more days, and he wants to go back to the South.'

They all sat around him in a small circle, the three girls, their father and grandmother. The young man had taken off his boots. Reem stretched out her legs and covered his socks with her bare feet. Darina moved a little closer to get under her uncle's arm so he would hug her and stroke her head, while the old woman was sitting on the floor, giving round pieces of cheese with bread and olives.

Annoyed, their father shouted: 'What's all this? They're going to strangle you like that'.

His brother laughed as he hugged the little head leaning on him and crossed his legs with Reem's legs.

'That's how strangulation should be. It's the nicest way.'

Little Darina asked him: 'Have you any other kind of strangulation?'

Reem said sombrely: 'They strangle people with ropes and gallows'.

Darina asked: 'Are you scared of being strangled, Uncle?'

'He's not afraid of death' Reem asserted stoutly.

The old woman felt depressed, having finished handing round bread, cheese and olives. She addressed them all with a tone of authority. 'Come, this is no time to talk about death. Eat up and be grateful.'

All hands moved, first the guest's then the old woman's lifting up a piece of cheese to put in her younger son's mouth. All hands, the rough and the smooth, applied themselves to the task of cutting up pieces

of bread and cheese, moving as if they were weaving something on the ground, with quick movements going to the end of the table and then coming back to the small and the large mouths. Minutes passed before anyone spoke. Then the father raised his head and looked in his brother's direction.

'Are you definitely going back to the South?'

'The day after tomorrow at the latest', said his brother, looking at his bread.

'But they have passed orders to stop all military operations'.

'There is always some mission or other'.

'Have they confiscated your heavy weapons?'

The visiting brother stopped eating for a minute.

'That is not what's important.'

He raised his glass of water to gulp it down in one go, as if he were trying to extinguish a fire.

The girls' father was still serious as he resumed the conversation with his younger brother.

'Don't overdo things. You will only kill yourself.'

The younger brother smiled. 'Don't worry, I won't. He laughed, 'Perhaps because I'm still not yet thirty, I won't be an opportunist. Anyway, I've got nothing to lose.'

The girls' father looked annoyed. He got up and went out of the room and everyone heard him saying from a distance in a loud and angry voice: 'You're nothing but children. When you're under thirty you have no proper appreciation of anything. You behave like children in matters of life, of politics...'

Before their grandmother came to switch off the bedroom light that night, the girls had got into the large bed and pulled the cover over them. Dima turned towards her two sisters, looking worried.

'Why did Father get cross and leave the

table?'

Little Darina pulled the cover up to her nose, and said from under it: 'Because he is an opportunist.'

Dima said irritably: 'Oh, be quiet. You must be mad. What is that, anyway?'

Darina pulled the cover up over her eyes, so that only her jet black hair could still be seen.

'Isn't it good that he should be called an opportunist? Perhaps it was an insult.'

Reem propped herself up on her elbows.

'I love Uncle. I'm going to ask him to take me back with him to Arnoun'.

'Children are dying in large numbers there,' Dima reminded her shakily.

Reem said: 'I have seen children younger than me carrying machine-guns.'

Darina poked her head from under the cover. 'Children over there used to snatch food from rubbish heaps... and their colour would turn pale, and they would die like sick chickens.'

Dima's voice rose sharply: 'Remember, we did nothing but weep when the house used to shake like a swing, and its sides crumbled like a hut built on sand by the sea'.

Suddenly their grandmother's voice was heard as she came to put out the light.

'That's enough now. Talking about something before going to sleep means you'll see it in your dreams.'

Dima, the middle of the three sisters, looked older than either of them. She was slim and straight and made a point of pushing her hair behind her ears to hang down her back. Whenever she looked at anyone she would startle them, because her eyes looked strange, like the eyes of someone crazed. They had a prominent, fixed look about them. That morning she had cried at school when a teacher had shouted at her: 'Why are you staring at me?' She had been gazing into the teacher's face and did not turn her eyes away from her until

she was shaken by the teacher's shout. She had rushed to the playground crying, to the physical education lesson. The girls stood three in a line. Dima joined them. She took her place in the back of the third row, and she bent her head, ashamed, while her eyes shed their last tears.

'Dima, lift up your arms...come on, girls...start!'

The girls started moving slowly to the right and to the left, their bodies bending as far as the waist to one side and then to the other. Dima felt that this movement was relieving her tiredness and anxiety. The movement became fast, faster. The rows looked like three waves. The teacher shouted: 'Come on... raise your arms... I want you to be like birds... move gracefully, gently... come on, fly. All right, birds... yes, birds, higher, faster, more, more...'

The grandmother noticed Dima's body moving on the bed. She had opened her arms out wide, while she lay face down. Her hands were rising and falling, and she was touching her head with her hands, while her body kept moving. The old woman made an effort to straighten the girl's arms. Then she kissed her gently, worried in case the little girl should wake up.

When all was dark, Dima opened her eyes. She had stopped moving her arms in the air. All was dark and gloomy. She was scared, as if the darkness of the night had seeped into her heart and was oppressing her. She was near the sea, and the sea was not calm. It was a black, gloomy sea, dark and desolate. She looked out over the water. The waves could be heard but not seen in that pitch darkness. Her body trembled, feeling that there was something under the water which terrified her and left her distraught. Two men had carried her mother's body and thrown it into the sea, while her father stood watching, speechlessly. He led the three weeping little girls, taking them to a narrow place that had been

cleared among the piled goods on board, the crates of arms and crates of apples, which the cargo ship was carrying, together with them and their wounded mother.

Afterwards, after the death, it was not possible to carry the body with them a further thirty-six hours until they could land and it had been thrown into the sea. At that moment, she felt a strong hatred towards her father. But she had to conceal her feelings. Nothing was impossible. They could have been attacked at sea, made to return to Sidon. There was no other course but to continue the journey. A peculiar dizziness was affecting the passengers sheltering between the closed crates, a dizziness which caused sickness and made them want to throw themselves into the sea. The dizziness affected Dima now in bed, but dreaming of that dark sea.

Thrashing about, Dima fell off her bed on to the floor, striking her head, then crying and screaming. Her uncle came into the bedroom, lifted her back into her bed and held her gently.

'She sees her mother in her dreams. The girls don't know how to express their grief. They talk about anything except their mother and her body being buried at sea,' the grandmother said in a whisper.

The uncle was looking gravely at the picture of Arnoun hanging on the wall. He was about to leave, while Reem stood beside him, following the movement of his eyes.

'Give me the crayons, Reem', he said.

The shuttles crossed like two swords in the old woman's hands, as she pushed the coloured-pencil box with one of her shuttles towards Reem. The sharp point of the shuttle again pricked her finger. The old woman cried out as her finger bled. It was strange that this should happen for the second time in years, first when her son arrived and then just as he was leaving.

The soldier lifted his hand up to the

picture and drew a red spot in the middle of the mountain. Then, in the space of a few seconds, he had kissed the old woman, hugged Reem and her two sisters, and slammed the door behind him.

The house was silent once more. The slightest sound could be heard in it, whether it was an ant moving, water dripping, or the three little girls whispering. One could hear the clash of the two shuttles in the hands of the old woman, who sat in the dark corner of the room. It was possible to hear her working, but not to see her in the dark. The sound of the shuttles was mixed with her broken sobs. Then little Darina hastened out of the dark room. Her father raised his head momentarily from the paper he was reading.

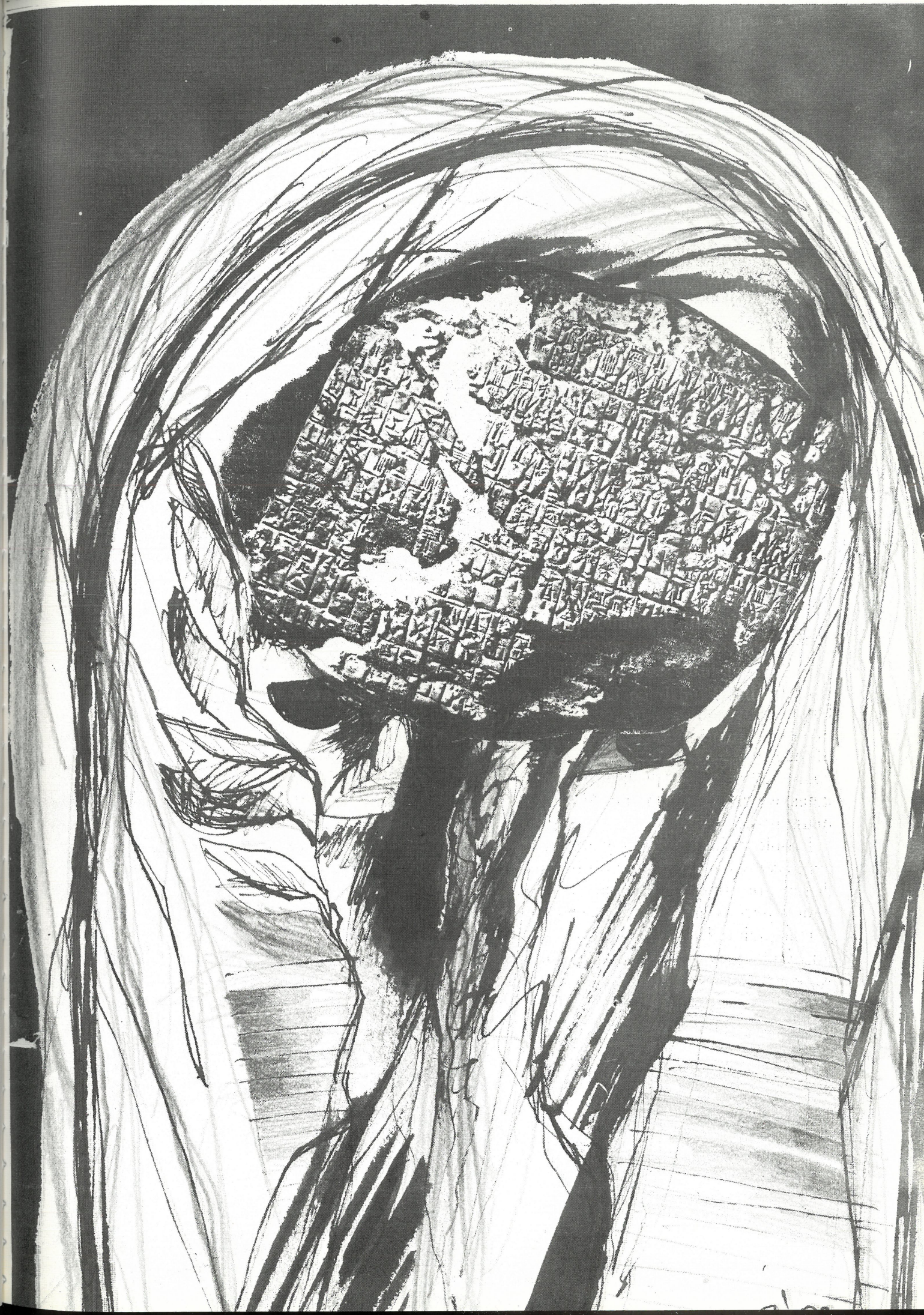
'Grandma cries a lot these days, Father', said the child soberly.

The father raised his head again, dark glasses above his sullen face. His lips, whenever they moved, looked like two mountains sinking into the sea.

'Let her cry,' he said. 'Tears dry up quickly'.

Reem was in a distant room, repeating to herself the last sentence she had written in her composition book.

'Lebanon, the best word I can utter, grant me a return to you. That I may see your white waves and your sun, setting into the sea.'



Mahmoud Gindari

A State of War

For over thirty years now, at the end of each day I carry a small paper or nylon carrier bag in my pocket and go slowly down the dark narrow lane where I live to buy some bread. Occasionally, I push my trembling fingers into my pocket where I put the bag to feel its coolness or warmth out of habit.

Throughout these years, I have become sure that it was not uneasy for me to reach the edges of some difficult or even impossible targets despite frustrations and hopes. It was difficult but I managed to reach the end of the small neighbourhood where I live and could tell its exact periphery and its four lanes which ran from the riverside to the main road.

I could walk as far as my amputated foot could carry me feeling the walls and corners dozens of times. First, this task seemed almost impossible. But I managed in time to get acquainted with all the details of this unusually dark lane where a stream of dirty water of red, blue and black colours clove its way. It is a narrow lane leading to the main road and ends exactly to the right of the zebra-crossing. At the end of each day I

have to be careful not to lose my balance and stumble in crossing the road to get the baker's. I wait for only a few seconds to get the hot bread packed in the bag. And off I go using the same route and trying to convince myself that the light pain in my amputated foot was nothing but mere numbness.

I had met faces of particular features. Over the years, these features were engraved in my mind. Each time I saw one I remembered another. But in the end, faces got mixed up and became one face with specific features. Each day, these faces passed by the lane peering into the darkness looking for rather unimaginable things behind the drawn curtains or for secrets whose concealment hurts the soul and stings the aging heart.

As usual that afternoon, I put the bag into my pocket and with uneasiness I crossed the road, I was extremely cautious and nervous to see the vehicles dashing by like devils sending deafening noises. Their blurring lights drove me insane. I crossed the road swearing at the non-stop honking cars and their flashing lights on both sides of

the road. As soon as I evaded a car, another one was about to hit me with its bumper. However, I managed to cross the road and found myself in front of the baker's. It was unexpectedly closed. I could not recall seeing it closed at this time before, not even once. "There is plenty of time" I said to myself, "And there should be another baker's elsewhere in the vicinity. I ought to buy some bread and it should be so difficult" So, I went on, very slowly and as far as my damned foot could carry me.

The neighbourhood was not unfamiliar to me. I still remember some of its old features. I wondered whether it had changed. It had been long since I set a foot on these lanes. A long time must have passed and left indelible traces. How many years have passed since the last World War? How many years have passed since the first Palestine war? Time has always been long and painful. It slips unnoticed so one can only remember bits and pieces.

I continued to walk trying to find my way with the help of the remaining old signs wherever they were eligible. In the past there used to be a spacious plot of land littered with the bodies of old and burned cars. Around them there were heaps of garbage and empty cans. But this scene existed no more. Instead, there stand giant concrete pillars dwarfing the tottering houses. I could see no more those dark corners where the drunks used to urinate in the past in the night.

These were familiar corners for us in the old days of cheap and adulterated wine. In those days, getting drunk was the only outlet and compensation for losers and heartbroken people. With hasty and uneasy steps they used to pass by either to pass water or, at least, to empty their stomach of the hot rotten chick-peas before going back home. Now, those familiar corners are neat with rows of yellow and grey bricks. In the nearby, there is a gold yellow tap whose clear water drops wettened the dust giving an unusual odour. It was a mixture of wet dust, rusted iron and urine. I had never

before smelt something like it in the old days. I rather used to hear from inside these corners rattlings and ugly voices singing, swearing or raving. So everything has changed. And I walked away.

I remembered that this lane used to lead to a similar lane with similar houses. But, this time the lane was divided into two sides by a black concrete pillar; a town of black concrete. The makeshift bric-a-brac shop was no more there. Perhaps it was bulldozed by one of those bloody machines, designed to demolish and remove. But, what happened to my Palestinian friend Mamdouh Yasser? How many years had I been away from this lane? How many people had passed away since I last saw Mamdouh Yasser? It must have been a long time indeed. Days were heavy with details. Everything had changed: the lanes, the buildings, the yards and even the bric-a-brac shops and the old dark public bars. Food and drinks of several uncommon names were served and all had such a strange and irritating smell.

So, everything has unusually changed. "But where is Mamdouh Yasser? How is he doing now!?" I wondered. He was a brave man indeed. He was a man of war and a vigilant soldier. He would attack the enemy with no hesitation or fear. He would hit and fight in all directions with uncommon valour and watchfulness, "Mamdouh Yasser, you were indeed, a good swimmer and the best to use a bayonet, an axe and a hand grenade." I can never forget the courage of yours when, hiding together in a remote cave, you ordered me to chop off your smashed hand. And I did it with a sharp axe. Then you so bravely wrapped the naked bone with a piece of cloth and off we went. I suggested that you, Mamdouh, ought to take a rest and get some sleep. But you refused.

After those years, you started a new career sitting in the make shift shop, selling sweets, nails and old locks. I remember when you turned a blind eye on a little boy trying to secretly reach the basket of suia-

Mahmoud Gindari

Born in Mosul, 1939

Author of the following short story collections:

Years of Thirst (1968), *The Siege* (1978), *Cases* (1982).

na. I still remember you, Mamdouh, talking when the battle was over and when we could do no more acts of heroism. You insisted on coming with me. When I asked why you had chosen this town in particular, you were upset and yelled at me saying:

"I have friends there, and you are one of them."

"Is this the only reason?"

"No. I am going to marry a woman who lives there."

Everything in this world has changed, Mamdouh Yasser. Have you also changed or have you remained just like myself knowing nothing but the baker's shop, the nylon carrier bag and the lane?

I turned left and clove my way through the crowd, Indians, Pakistanis and men of dark brown complexion said to be from Alexandria, Dumyat and Cairo. As if in an auction, they were standing there gazing at cassette recorders or small radios in the shape of a ball, a sports shoe or an orange. I could hear the familiar voice of an Iraqi radio announcer reading a military communique about a fierce battle raging somewhere on the battlefield. "I wish you were here at this very moment Mamdouh, listening with me to the military communique. But, alas! I do not know where you are!" I said.

The place of the battle was not unfamiliar to me. I had a feeling that I had seen it or heard of it quite a lot before. I read about it in Sadoun's letters two months ago. In his last one, he described the place to me. How strange! The whole letter was about this place. He asked me to look for his mother and convey his greetings to her. I will.

I continued although there was no sign of a bakery in this lane. There was not even a place where one could take a rest.

The lane was narrow and mysteriously dark. It was not so thirty years ago. Concrete structures stood up supported by giant pillars painted in dark green. I saw dozens of torn coloured posters stuck on the pillars. I could see pictures of dozens of things: actors and open mouths and artifi-

cial beards stuck on their faces. Their fingers were pointing upwards. I could see bank notes spilling over from a leather bag put upside down while some human hands were trying to grab the money. Probably they were the hands of the actors with artificial beards. Stone kings were sitting on marble benches making a toast with stone glasses. I could see small children coming out of a blue cloud with eagle-claws looking like human fingers pointing upwards. Their legs could not be seen because they hid behind the cloud. Half naked men and women were surrounding a dying blind spotted snake inside a glass box. Others were gazing at a word written in white chalk on black, presumably representing a dark night that dominated the whole poster. A single word that meant nothing to a passer-by like me: "Get up."

Only one poster drew my attention. It showed a military man, either an officer or a private, with helmet pressing hard on his forehead like a sword put between his eyes. It was a unique picture of a military man of serious features and sharp looks. It could be the picture of Mamdouh Yasser or Sa'doun Ibrahim al-Ashtar. Peering at the poster I thought I could see a hidden smile behind the soldier's lips. No one else at that moment could see it. Now I remember I had seen this smile before and on Mamdouh Yasser's lips when I chopped off his hand. I saw it on Sa'doun's lips six months ago when a deep wound on his neck was being stitched. They all beat the intolerable physical pain with a smile which appears when they press hard on their lips. It is an exceptional case when the desire for survival becomes an obsession, though pain never ceases to grow. Who else other than me, Ibrahim al-Ashtar, could perceive each detail of such a case.

I said to myself perhaps there is no bakery in this part of the town. I tried to ignore the green and black poster stuck on dozens of the pillars along the road. The further I went the closer and the clearer the details appeared to me; a cannon barrel and

the eyes of a man looking upwards perhaps at something known only to them. Probably, it was the same place mentioned in the communique. The cannon barrel looks narrower if you look at it from below. But the eyes of the man become wider whenever you go away from it. Again I found myself penetrating through walls of suspicion and caution. I felt I had to clear my way through a throng of people in order to cross to another lane, old and deserted. It reminded me of the long and monotonous years. It was an old and damp lane. "But why my heart aches? What is this restlessness in my veins for? Is it my one leg"? I wondered.

I had no other option but to continue. For more than two hours I have been walking through these damp lanes and now I want to find out where they all lead to. I was sure I could get some bread by the end of the day. I had no doubt about it. My failure to find a bakery did not worry me. I still could look at all directions and get assured by the look in the eyes of the man depicted in the posters and by his smile. The growing pain in my amputated foot did not scare me at all. Sometimes I feel the pain even when I lie on bed. I never care. It won't cripple me anymore.

Once Mamdouh Yasser said "This stubbornness will kill you one day."

"Then you want me to give in because of this camel hoof-like damned foot," I responded.

Mamdouh shook his head and laughed. "Do whatever you like, your number is not up yet," he replied.

I continued. The pain was persistent and it crept up to my knee. I could not make out my way clearly. I thought of having some rest, but then a female voice calling my name, Ibrahim al-Ashtar, pierced into my ears, I was taken aback. "Who could it be?" I asked. I felt the empty carrier bag and it was still there. I hurried back without knowing why I was overwhelmed by fear and hesitation. Perhaps, it was the only female voice that had scared me ever since my birthday.

The voice was coming from a nearby corner. "It did scare me, Mamdouh Yasser," I said. A sense of fear and shivering went through my body. "What brought me here? Did I have to buy bread today?" I murmured.

I pushed myself into another crowd but the voice followed me. This time it was closer. I stopped "What else could I have done, Mamdouh? I have not run for over thirty years now." A voice called my name, Ibrahim al-Ashtar. I had to stop because nobody in the lane except myself was called Ibrahim al-Ashtar. "There must be a baker's somewhere near where I could hide" I thought.

My fear doubled when I felt a hand resting on my shoulder. I could hardly breathe. "Where are you Mamdouh?" I wondered.

I was astounded for a moment. I turned around and looked at the face following me. I could hardly believe my eyes. "Impossible!" I exclaimed.

A pale face with restless cavernous eyes met my eyes. I asked her to look at the poster on the pillar. She did not.

"Don't you remember me, Ashtar?" She asked. "Have you grown too old to forget faces?"

"You are right, and this damned foot has almost crippled me" I replied, "but I recognized your voice right away and I was frightened."

"Do you think I have changed?" She asked.

"No, No. It's me and the town that have changed."

We walked along. She was so confused that I could hardly understand what she was saying. She asked what I was doing in that part of town. I told her the story of the closed bakery and my three-hour search for an open one. She asked about Sa'doun and the communique that I just heard. "So she knew the whereabouts of Sa'doun," I said. It was a relief to me.

I told her that Sa'doun had asked about her in his last letter and how I promised to

look for her. There we are face to face in an old, damp and eerie lane.

"I shall write to him telling him you are not dead and still alive and as strong as a horse" I said. She did not say a word. Then she talked only about herself as we walked together. Her words, though not entirely unambiguous, they brought back to memory the agony of the past years. She, Sa'doun's mother, was still strangely yearning for the old days.

Sa'doun was her first son. More than thirty years ago, each of us went his own way in life to a completely different world that took us apart. We separated quietly two years after he was born. I married another woman. A year later, she married a Palestinian friend of mine, Mamdouh Yasser. Sa'doun was under her custody but later she agreed that I took Sa'doun from her. The matter was settled peacefully between us. She chose a man who was so dear to me. He was brave and adamant. She was of a noble and rich family. Her folks avoided loud disagreements and disputes over unquestionable matters. Sa'doun was my son and legally I had the right to take him into my custody sooner or later. So did I. Her parents hated to appear before courts or to make any deals with a man as talkative as myself.

I did not have children from my second wife. But she bore children from Mamdouh Yasser who was known for his uncommon valour. She never stopped loving her son, Sa'doun. On my part, I tried to be nice to her. I let her see him whenever and wherever she liked. Mamdouh Yasser used to carry him on his shoulders when he was a little boy and took him to her. Years later, Sa'doun became a stout boy. Occasionally, he visited her whenever he liked. It was then when I lost contact with Mamdouh Yasser. It was quite strange that Sa'doun never talked about his mother nor about Mamdouh Yasser during his visits.

She took notice of the carrier bag in my pocket. She looked into my face and before uttering a word, I said: "All right, I still go

out everyday to buy bread as I used to do in the old days. How about that?" I exclaimed. "I do for others what I used to do for you" "And what I found in others is more than I found in you. But, as you can see, this is life, and I cannot find a baker's shop as if I was a stranger in this town," I said.

"You must have lost your way to the baker's shop" she answered. "But this is not a problem," Then she moved a few steps away and pointed to a shop. "There it is, on the other side of the road. Walk in this direction, you'll find yourself right in front of it. By the way, take this letter to Sa'doun."

She bid me farewell with a smile. Then, she walked away and disappeared among the crowds.

At that very moment, I felt a kind of relief as though I woke up after a horrible nightmare. Surely her voice was sharp and her tone was bitter. Her voice did startle me though I could always imagine a woman's features from the voice her lips utter. Mamdouh used to say "Ibrahim al-Ashtar will die in the arms of a woman." But this never happened to me. The voice of Sa'doun's mother was deep and sharp. I knew it right away.

At last, there I was at the baker's shop. I put the hot bread in the carrier bag and off I went on my way home. I took a long and zig-zag route to avoid passing through those crowded lanes and auctions. I had to go on. It was difficult to walk with a hoof-like amputated foot and another tired and heavy one. As I approached the lane where I live, I noticed a faint yellowish light from a distance. When I got closer, I saw on the opposite side of the road people gathering around a taxi. It was slightly dark yet. I could see a coffin wrapped with a flag. Only the upper part of the coffin could be seen. I slowed down to keep a distance between the crowd and myself. I said "Look Mamdouh Yasser, this is another man with a helmet that presses hard on his forehead and firm determined eyes that get bigger as

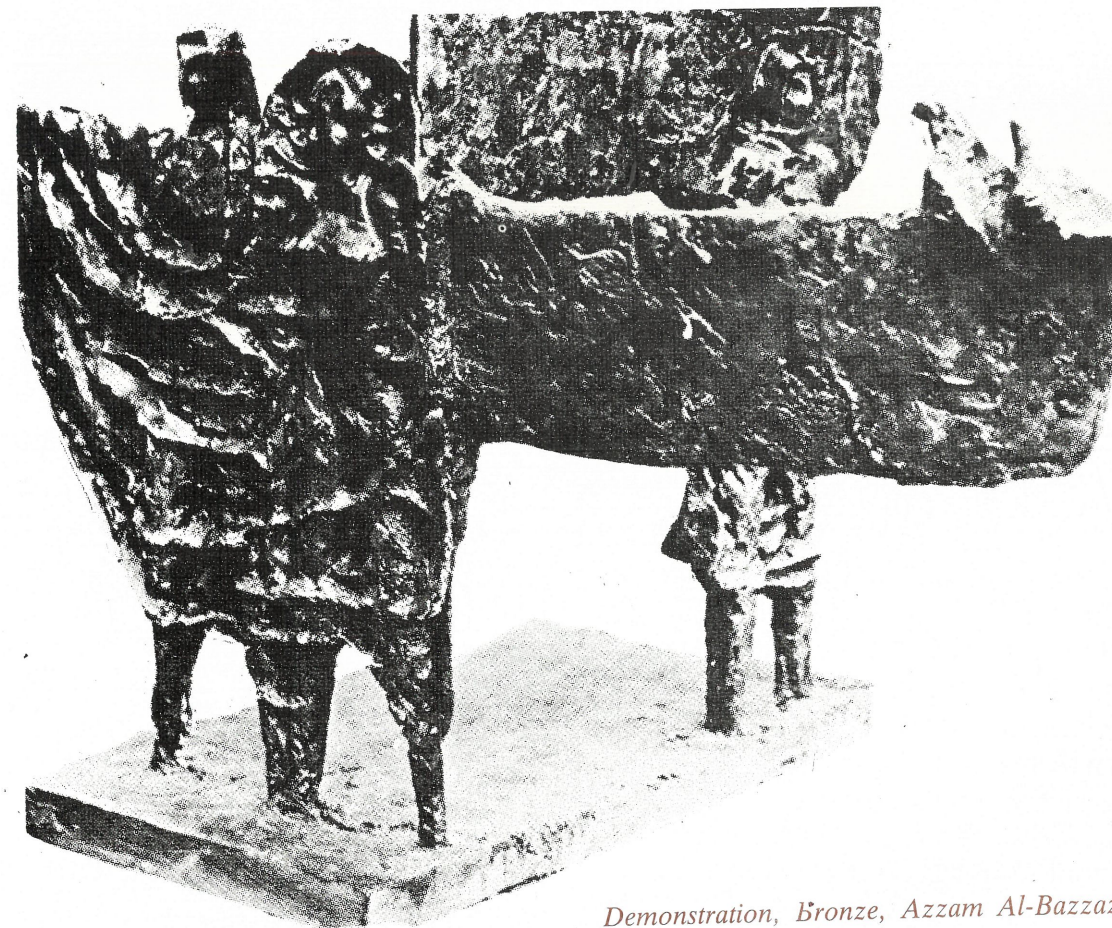
you go away from him. He must have been a courageous and creative man and the son of a noble family."

The taxi passed by and the crowd dispersed, I crossed the street and at the entrance of the narrow lane, I saw the taxi coming. I stuck myself to the wall to let it pass. My goodness! It is the same taxi with the flag-wrapped coffin. In the middle of the lane it stopped for a while. The taxi driver seemed to be asking a little boy standing by the wall. The boy pointed to the end of the lane and the car pulled out. I walked up to the boy. I was about to ask him which house was the driver looking for but he went in and disappeared. So I walked on and the hot bread was still under

my elbow. The car engine was still running. At my doorstep I heard a man saying "he was a brave man and the son of a good family."

I said "Yes, indeed, Sa'doun Ibrahim al-Ashtar was a brave and great man." As I went inside, the flag-wrapped coffin was right in the middle of my house. I put the bag of bread in its usual place and took out the letter Sa'doun's mother gave to me and put it near his head. With solemn silence I sat down near the coffin. I felt a bitter pain raging in my inner most; pain that went up to my head and down to my amputated foot. But, little by little the pain eased down until it completely disappeared.

Translated by Afaf I. Ali



Demonstration, Bronze, Azzam Al-Bazzaz.



*Man and Mask,
Bronze, Ismail Fattah.*

Abdul Rahman Majeed Al-Rubai'e

The Gate and the Will

Hashim unusually woke up late. He would have slept a little longer if the alarm clock had not gone off at the time he had set it on.

It was Friday. On this day everyweek he used to have another hour of lie-in. It was simply an hour to relax. For today he was in no hurry to shave, have breakfast and hastily put on his clothes. He did not need to drive his wife to work nor to pack off his two sons to school. Neither would he need to dash off to his office to study the cases that would need his attention or to prepare notes for the ones he would be going to defend soon.

He would like Friday to be a day for full relaxation.

But this would not be the case, for there is a backlog of work to be done on this day. He set out doing them and finding out later that he had been at them all day. Today, for instance, he had to get the blacksmith to replace one side of the garden gate. It had been pulled apart by the wind weeks ago and he could not find a blacksmith who would leave his smithy and come with him to fix it. They were all busy, ever beating

scraps of irons, windows, doors and other things. Only one of them obliged and agreed to come. It was more than a month ago that he came with him to see what was wrong with it. The man named a fee for his service and Hashim did not argue but agreed immediately. He just wanted the gate to be repaired. But the man was never seen at the date he fixed. When Hashim called on him again he apologized for not being able to keep up the appointment because of the sudden departure of one of his Egyptian assistants. He promised Hashim to fix it as soon as his assistant came back. When Hashim asked him how long the Egyptian would be away, the blacksmith said just a week or two at the most. However, the week or two at the most extended to be two months or more. Still, Hashim continued to call on the smithy at least twice a week because that was the only blacksmith in the neighbourhood. Besides, he was the only one who agreed to do the job, fixed his charges and did not object to a thing.

"Come tomorrow, ten o'clock sharp" said the blacksmith to Hashim when he called on

Abdul Rahman Majeed al-Rubai'e

Born 1939. Author of :

Sword and the City (1966), Shadow in the Head (1968), Faces from the Journey of Suffering (1969), The Other Seasons (1970), The Tatoo (1974), The City's Memory (1975), The Moon and the Walls (1976), The Horses (1977), Longitudes and Latitudes (1983).

him the day before. "I'll be coming with you. Don't be late for I have so many jobs to do"

"A word of honour?" asked Hashim.

"It is, but you should be here on time." replied the blacksmith.

"O.K. , I'll be there at half past nine," Hashim said to himself as he was going home.

He felt sick whenever he saw the rope holding the two folds of the gate, a crude way meant to keep out stray dogs and children.

On his first visit, the blacksmith inspected the gate carefully.

"Why don't you just replace it with another one and spare yourself a lot of trouble," he asked Hashim.

"The problem won't end there," replied Hashim to replace the gate I would have to pull down the whole fence, and I have neither the time nor the mood for that. Do repair it for us and may God reward you."

Hashim rubbed his eyes and yawned. He felt a stinging feeling in his eyes caused by his long vigil before the telly, watching an Arabic film. He sat the film out despite its being silly. Sometimes, he would feel compelled to watch things he considered trivial but people believed them interesting and so much enjoyed them that it infuriated him.

He reached out for the eyedrop vial on the table next to him, lay on his back and started to administer the medicine onto his eyes. He moved his eyelid a little to let his eyes get saturated by the liquid which had a burning but nice sensation.

His wife had been up earlier, and was busy ironing in the next room. He could hear her saying, "Before going to sleep, the two boys wanted you to buy them *kahi* (puff-pastry) and double cream for breakfast,"

"Sure, I know" he replied.

He shook his body up from the pleasant relaxation he was in, sat on the bed's edge, yawned, beat his chest with his fist and got up. He stood there slowly waving his arms about in simple physical exercises as the

doctor had advised him to. While he was thus exercising he reviewed his agenda for the day. After calling on the blacksmith he should get someone to fix wire-nets over the windows of the house. He had bought them earlier but postponed fixing them till he had the garden gate repaired. "We should finish with the gate first," he would say whenever his wife reminded him "We'll do one thing at a time."

Fixing these wire-nets was equally urgent, because summer had stepped in bringing flies and mosquitoes to swarm the gardens. Nevertheless, windows would be essential for ventilation and opening them at night would make fans dispensable. But it was too early to talk of fans, anyway. Then, he would not like to use these artificial means of air-cooling. They would not often succeed in keeping heat out of these concrete houses which face the glare of the sun, alongside streets surfaced with asphalt so vulnerable to heat that it would melt under feet.

He had once read that artificial means of air-cooling were the reason behind the spread of rheumatism and other physical ailments. Hashim himself suffered from this, especially because his arm had not quite healed. He still felt the pain throbbing through it and he would take 'Brufen' or 'Ativan' tablets before going to sleep.

Unlike him, his wife would not feel comfortable unless she directed the current of the cool air towards her and switched on the ceiling fan to the full. He often wondered

When he watched her thus asleep-how could she sleep with the cool air directed towards her, not to mention the fan that revolved so audibly.

And they often quarreled over this-which would make him take his pillow down to sleep in the reception.

He drew the curtain a little and let the sun get into the room, and went out.

"Don't dawdle away your time, and remember your appointment with the blacksmith," his wife stressed.

Hashim passed his hands over his stubbly beard which he would regularly shave except on Fridays. He would give his face a one-day respite after six successive morning shaves. It was a habit he acquired from a friend of his who would forgo every routine on Friday even taking a bath, brushing his teeth and watching his food intake. That friend of his was a doctor. He would assure Hashim that monotony should be disrupted once a week which is what our circumstances allow us with. But Hashim would say: I would forgo anything except my bath habit. I couldn't do without a bath. "

He climbed down the stairs and headed to the bathroom.

The warm water was a must for him. He enjoyed the feel of it forcing its way through the holes of the douche and running down on his head and body. Meanwhile, he would hum the first song that would come to his mind or come on the radio which he would often take to the bathroom to enjoy some music.

It was the only time he would listen to music.

At night, he would only listen to news and watch whatever the telly offers from variety songs and series.

He picked up the radio from the large table at the living room and switched it on. It was the same broadcaster reading out her morning thoughts, repeating the same sentences which she had never changed: "A morning full of twittering birds, coloured sparrows, and green trees...etc."

Change of seasons would never change. She used to utter them in autumn and winter alike when there were no twittering birds nor coloured sparrows. Moreover, she would persist in depicting green trees even when they would stand bare.

This broadcaster did not seem to take time off not even for one day. She took neither sick nor maternity leave nor anything of that sort. The things she parroted about on the radio would usually become material for jokes he exchanged with his two sons and their mother at the dinner

table. These jokes would extend to include sports-football in particular. His two sons were keen on supporting some football clubs. They had filled their rooms with pictures of their favourite team. Hashim would tease them by turning to one of them and calling his team. "keese" (1). Having succeeded in provoking him, he would turn to the other and call his team 'keese'. Sometime they would sulk and leave the table.

Hashim turned on the tap and water rushed down with a force too loud for that hour. The radio which he placed on the bathroom shelf was still playing songs and words. But before he turned on the shower the radio played a song which made him wonder why the broadcasting people were so fond of. He heard it for the first time when he had been still in primary school. Radios, then, were operated by car batteries which were bigger than the radio itself. Unlike those, radios now were compacts, durable and operated by small batteries placed within the radio itself and not outside.

"Good morning Lola..." he was not sure whether it was Lola with a final 'a' or an 'e'. Nor was he sure what the name could signify, but this was how the song continued, the song which the radio could not do without for 30 years. The singer's voice was even more like a man than that of a woman.

Hashim went on listening to the song as the water beat sleep out of his body and supplied him with waves of energy that increased with the flow of the water.

All the same, he was fond of this song because it was related to the past, to old days, to back streets, to people going to work before sunrise, people whose breakfast was tea and bread, and whose sweat was incessant. Those people used to be exhausted. They went to bed early to wake up in time for morning prayer. They would pray and appeal to God for mercy and forgiveness for wrongs they did not commit. Then, they would spread out about the

town that took them from their villages and fields.

One day, Hashim left that world behind. He boarded a slow cargo train whose iron cars were spread with mats on which trunks, animals and some people piled.

"What are you going to do in Baghdad" his friend Nadhim used to tell him. "Do you aspire to be something more than an obscure lawyer whose office is only a damp room in a semi-deserted building, and all you dream of then is to get a divorce case or a will? There is no chance for your like. I know it.

"There must be a first step and I am going to make it," Hashim would argue.

"Stay with us. The civil servants club will miss you. Your absence will be felt on our evening walks by the river bank where the girls of the town with their black "Abaya" walk too looking for a man they could fantasize about even though they would not have the courage to answer his hello."

Nadhim stayed behind swigging a bottle of wine every night. The coughing fits which seized him in the morning persisted all day. A doctor of his acquaintances examined him and informed him sadly, "Tuberculosis is gnawing at your lungs."

Nevertheless, this did not change his life style. He went on with drinking a bottle of wine every night in addition to a packet of cigarettes and some more sorrows. Then he withdrew from social life and stayed indoor till he died.

Hashim murmured to himself, "Nadhim is dead and I am still alive." He held up his left arm and passed his finger over the hole left by a bullet in his shoulder. The distance between it and his heart was no more than 3 cm. It could have lodged in his heart and sent him to join Nadhim, his mother, his sister and all those dear ones who passed away. But the bullet penetrated his shoulder.

The water was still running. Hashim continued to hum with the song "good morning Lola" or Lole. It didn't make any difference. The singer's hoarse voice did

not even sound feminine.

Nadhim was gone. His lungs were so gnawed that air whistled through his chest as in a vast desert. Hashim himself survived. The bullet was extracted from his chest in a field hospital and the infiltrator who shot him was arrested. Hashim saw him when he came round from his coma. He was a small, bushy-bearded man who looked famished. He would answer any question put to him in his language in a mumble, like a dumb beast. A friend of Hashim pointed at the creature and said:

"We arrested him as soon as we located the place from which the shot came."

Hashim did not comment. He just felt he needed some rest because losing a great deal of blood left him drained. They were going to move him to a nearby hospital to continue having treatment.

The song ended and Lola' or 'Lole' was left on her own. He ought to turn off the tap now but first he had to increase the flow of the cold water even if for a few seconds so as to feel fully fresh. Then he would dry himself, put on his clothes and go out to buy the promised *kahi* and double cream. He would also have to go out again to fetch the blacksmith. Afterwards, he would have to look for a worker to fix the wire nets on the windows. This was his vicious circle and he had to cope with its movement. There was no way out.

2. The door bell rang. Hashim had already finished with drying his body and started to put on his underclothes. He hurried to the reception room and drew the curtain a little to see who was coming. It was his neighbour Abdul Hameed. He slipped on his indoor garment *Dishdashu*,⁽²⁾ opened the door and walked towards the garden. He answered Abdul Hameed's resonant greeting before he reached him. Hashim untied the rope that held the two parts of the garden gate.

"Couldn't you have it repaired?" asked Abdul Hameed while examining the gate.

"I am going to, today," replied Hashim. "I have an appointment with the blacksmith.

I have been chasing him for weeks to do."

"I know you get up early" said Abdul Hameed apologising for coming so early. "That is why I have come." Its alright, do come in " said Hashim.

Abdul Hameed followed him to the reception where Hashim opened the window to change the stuffy air of the room.

"Would you like tea or coffee?" said Hashim before knowing the reason of Abdul Hameed's visit

"No, thanks, I've already had enough," replied his guest.

"But you must," insisted Hashim.

"Well then, tea please."

3. Cool and moist air replaced the stuffy air of the room. Meantime, his wife stopped ironing and went down to the kitchen to make some tea.

Abdul Hameed sat opposite Hashim with his back to the window. There was a low and broad table between them. From his position, Hashim could see the front garden. As he was running his eyes between his neighbour and the garden, he noticed that the lawn had grown and needed to be mown. He felt depressed at the idea of another chore to be added to his long list. Still, to banish these thoughts and dedicate himself to his guest he told himself, "I will repair the gate first, and other things will follow in their order of importance."

Abdul Hameed was somewhat a squat man. In those days when they were together he lost a lot of weight during the arduous exercises in handling weapons and jumping over natural obstacles, he acquired a physical fitness fit for a fighter. Now, as he had put on a lot of weight, he seemed much older than his real age, being forty.

There was a white patch over his skin. It stretched over an area including that below his nose from the right side as well as half his lips from the same side down to his chin. There were other patches on his right hand and on the heel of his enormous foot. These were marks that distinguish Abdul Hameed. Hashim had no idea how he had acquired them or whether he was born with

them. When his eldest son asked him he was at a loss for an answer.

Abdul Hameed's son who was not ten yet has inherited these patches as well. But they covered parts of his body other than those of his father, such as his right cheek, and the calf of his right leg. What made these patches on Abdul Hameed's body and his son's look so white was the contrast with their dark brown skin. Abdul Hameed explained the reason for his visit. "Hashim, I've come to you because you are a lawyer and well-versed in law as such. Most of all because you have been a dear neighbour as well as my comrade in arms in the same group for several months where we moved between Al-Nahrawan military training camp and Al-Azair on the frontlines in southern Iraq. I've come for..."

"Now then, do you have to remind me of the nature of our relation?" said Hashim

"No, I couldn't help it," said Abdul Hameed.

"I'm ready to help you in whatever way you want me to."

"Our forefathers were wiser than us in some ways," explained Abdul Hameed. "For instance, when they had to go on a journey to another town they would write their wills and sign them in the presence of some witnesses and the chief in charge of their village or town. Nowadays we don't care about such matters." "What made you recall all this?" asked Hashim who seemed surprised.

"I was called up," replied Abdul Hameed as he was rubbing the palms of his hands together. "I am going to the front soon"

And when will that be? asked Hashim hiding his surprise.

"Sunday, the day after tomorrow" replied Abdul Hameed. "I would like you to draw up my will. If you've got enough time tomorrow, I will come with you to the notary public for authentication"

"What do you want it to say?" asked Hashim.

"As you know I own nothing other than

the house and the car," said Abdul Hameed. "I want the house to go to my three sons and the furniture and the car to my wife."

"Is that all?, asked Hashim.

"Yes," said his neighbour.

Hashim did not make any comment on his neighbour's request. He knew of some cases brought to court from one member of a family against another. It was thoughtful of Abdul Hameed to make his will now. Hashim, himself, would have dragged his wife and minor sons to this sort of trouble, if he had died when he was shot in his shoulder.

"I am not surprised by your request," said Hashim at last. The war is on and we will not hesitate when we are called up to perform our duty."

"Shall I give you the name and age of my children, and the full name of my wife?, asked Abdul Hameed .

"Certainly, hang on a moment, I'll get a paper."

He left the room for a while and came back with paper and pen. Abdul Hameed supplied the information he wanted.

"I'll be waiting for you at the office tomorrow morning at nine o'clock. I'll postpone other engagements. In some professions, such as medicine one has to overcome one's feeling for noble and humanitarian aims. So is the case with the legal profession."

"I have to spend two months of training before my group go to the battlefield. The training would help me recover my physical fitness. My belly has protruded again as soon as I came back from the front," said Abdul Hameed as he patted his belly.

"We may meet this time. Look, I can move my arm." commented Hashim moving his arm slowly and went on, "Damn that bloody bullet. You know something? I am still keeping it."

Abdul Hameed nodded in agreement, "I know. I was at your side when they took it out." Then he swallowed hard and added "You've done your share. A wound at your

age needs a longer time to heal."

"Abdul Hameed, are you sure we've grown old?" asked Hashim playfully.

"If we haven't aged yet, we will soon. The years rush by, you know," replied Abdul Hameed apologetically.

Hashim's wife was heard calling, "Hashim!"

Hashim left the room and came back with the tea. He placed a cup before his guest and put another before himself.

"Everything seems like a dream now. Have I really been there, using weapons, fighting and getting wounded? How did it all ended so soon?," said Hashim while he was stirring his tea. "The combat suit put us on an equal footing, I, the modest barber with you; the well-known lawyer" commented Abdul Hameed.

"It is not simply a matter of uniform; it is more than that. It brought us together and unified us under one objective: defending the homeland," interrupted Hashim.

There was a moment of silence during which the sound of sipping the tea could be heard.

"You are not going to be a cook again?" remarked, Hashim playfully.

Abdul Hameed chuckled aloud as if he had heard a very witty remark. "It seems so. My shape qualifies me for this job. Would you believe that before going to the front. I didn't have an inkling about cooking? I couldn't even make tea. I've never led a bachelor's life. Before getting married, I was the youngest among a bunch of sisters. Naturally I was spoiled. The mother gave me up to my wife. So when could I ever have learned the culinary art?"

"I differ from you in this respect. I spent my college years in evening classes. During the day I used to work as a clerk in Shorja with a tradesman who came from my hometown. I had often to move from one lodging to another, an inconvenience which made me innovate with cooking. For instance, I have a patent for inventing a recipe for cooking chicken gravy. A friend of mine used to insist on staying at the same lodging

where I had a room. I discovered lately that my cooking was the motive."

They started to laugh again.

4. When Abdul Hameed left, Hashim got up, brought pen and paper and sat at the dining table. At home, he would prefer to use the dining table as a desk. He did not feel comfortable when he would sit at a small table. For the moment, he forgot the *Kahia* and double cream which he was supposed to buy and so did he forget his appointment with the blacksmith. He was going to write down Abdul Hameed's will.

He started off slowly leaving blank spaces

for the names. He had left the paper on which the names were written in the reception.

He was writing with deliberation as if the paper was not going to be sent to the typist who would reproduce it elegantly. Meanwhile, a dormant sob he was not prepared for rose inside him and shock him. He tried to keep on writing but he could not.

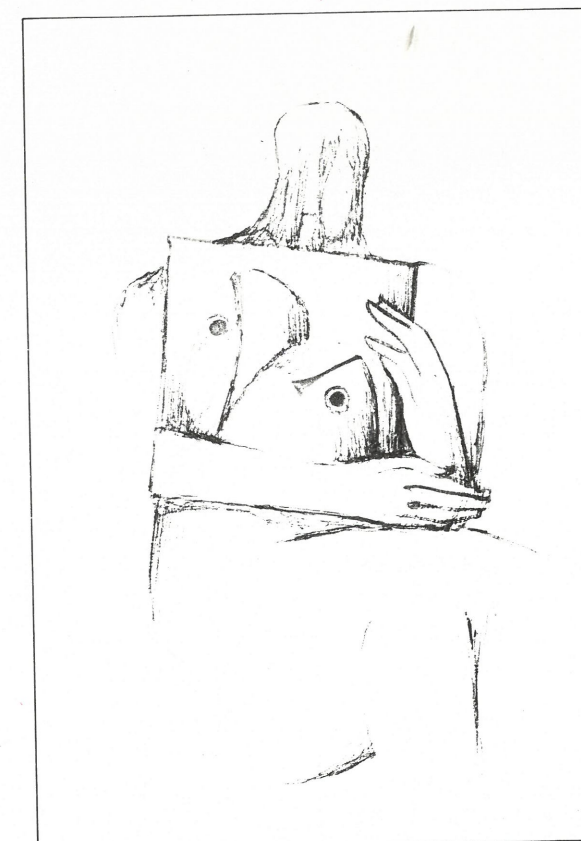
He felt the sob throughout his body. Even his arm which had been swathed in bandages for months, started to sob . The cut left by the extracted bullet on his arm turned to a huge eye bursting with blood and tears.

Translated by Suad Abid Ali.

Footnotes:

(1) The word "keese" in standard Arabic means a "bag" It is used in Iraqi slang and among football fans to deride a team

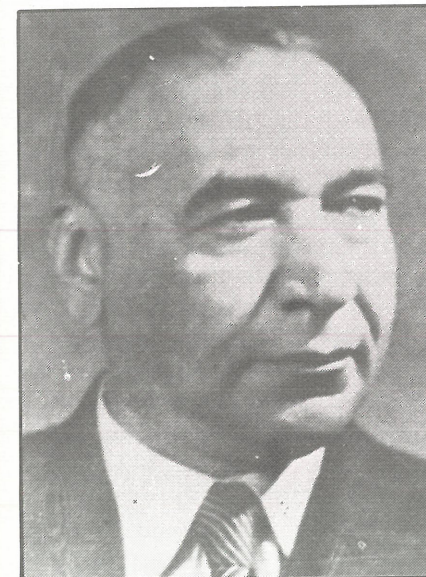
against which many goals have been scored.
(2) A long loose dress worn indoors.



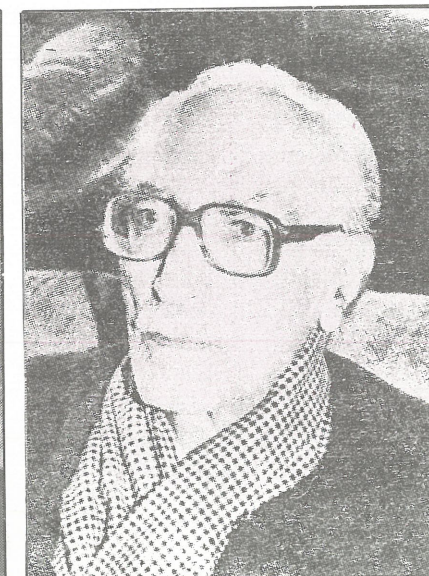
Pencil Drawing, Rakan Dabdoub.

Fiction Criticism in Iraq Its Rise and Development

Abdul Illah Ahmed, Ph.D.



Ja'far Al-Khalili:
major contribution to fiction criticism.



Abdul Haq Fadhil:
the problems of technical form.



Al-Sayid:
denounced his previous writings.

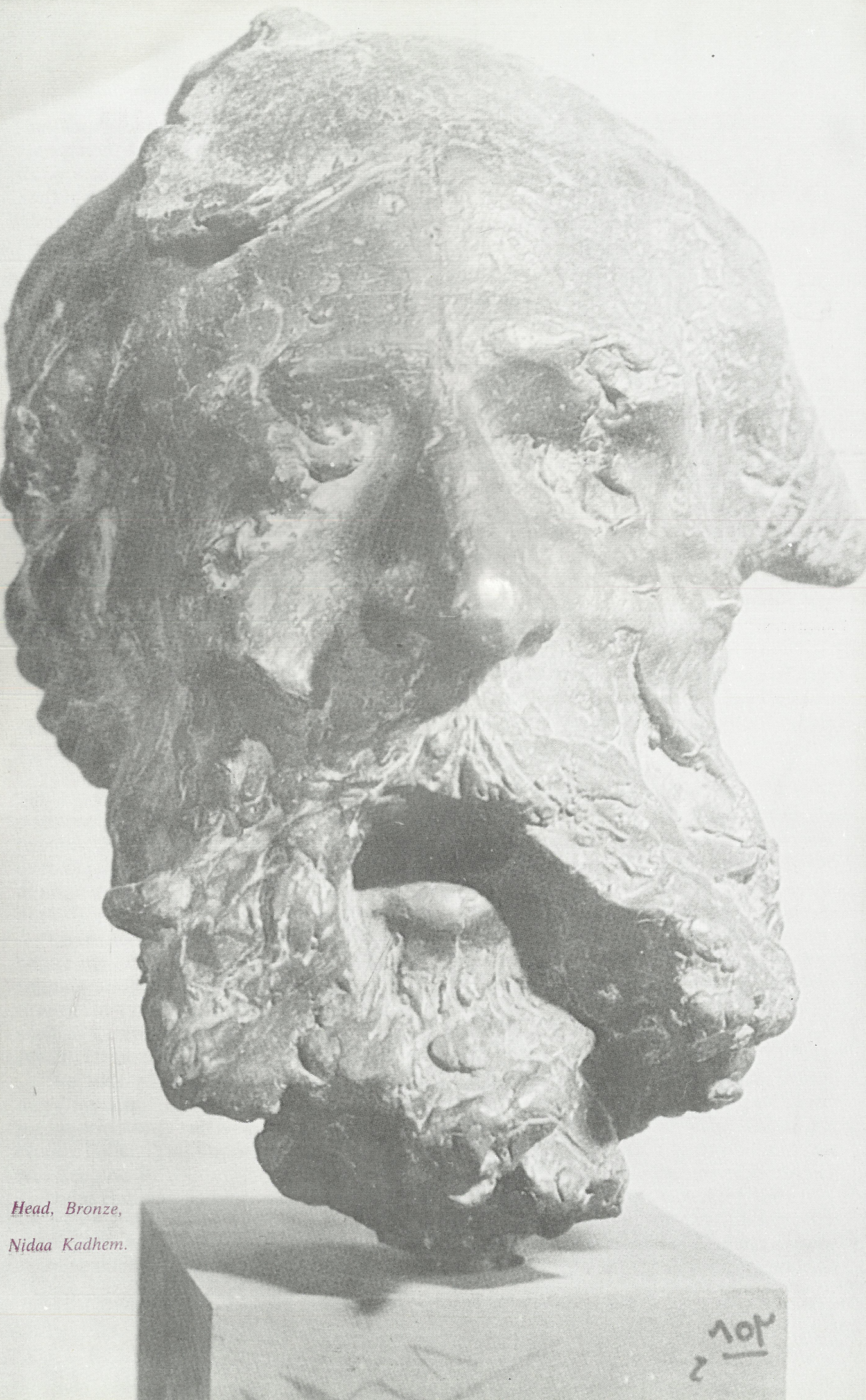
This essay is intended to clear up an ambiguous aspect of the creative activity in modern Iraqi literature, namely fiction criticism. Hence, it will not cover any critical attempts dealing with other literary genres. The critical attempts made by the Iraqi writers in their modern history are diverse. But you could not find just one specialised literary critic in Iraq, compared with the great number of Arab critics who have played an important part in the modern literary revival in the Arab world. Most of Iraqi literary attempts scattered in newspapers and journals throughout fifty years of Iraq's modern history do not reveal clear-cut critical features that can be studied on this basis.

However, to say that critical studies in Iraq are diverse does not mean that we take an attitude different from the accepted one in the literary circles in Iraq. That is to say literary criticism had failed to cope with modern Iraqi literature in its various trends and currents be it prose or poetry⁽¹⁾. Therefore, the role of criticism in the literary life was rather weak and even one of the important factors which led to the appearance of poor literature, particularly prose, in the view of many of those who studied the signs of stagnation and

weakness in modern Iraqi literature.

This essay is an attempt to give a full account of the critical activity which accompanied the evolution of modern Iraqi story during a limited period stretching from 1908 to 1939. Therefore, the approach adopted in this research is a historical one, seeking to follow the rise and development of this activity as a literary manifestation and simultaneously attempting to conclude some important results from the history of this genre in Iraq.

Story writing in Iraq is a recent genre appearing in the early years of this century. Consequently, the history of fiction criticism is confined to this period. On the other hand, such criticism cannot appear with the work at the same time. This genre demands a longer time to establish itself in society and to be assimilated by writers. Consequently, it is not expected to find narrative criticism in this early period of the history of this genre in Iraq, taking into consideration the fact that this period had only witnessed the birth of primitive attempts in the field of story-writing. Further, these attempts were of a limited number, almost devoid of any artistic value and did not show full realiza-



Head, Bronze,
Nidaa Kadhem.

tion of the nature of this genre.

The newspapers and journals issued after the declaration of the Ottoman Constitution in 1908 only had faint indications to this genre. These indications were intended to promote an understanding of the narrative genre. But these appeals lacked enthusiasm and showed a naive understanding. An early example of these appeals, and hence of narrative criticism in Iraq is the comment of *Lughat al-Arab* journal on a novel rendered into Arabic from French by Mohammed Dhiyab Beig⁽²⁾ in 1913. It said, "People have grown fond of reading fiction. The purpose of writing such novels is to cultivate people and bring them to the highest stage of civilisation and true civilised manner. But some people prefer what runs contrary to this well-meaning end. They read books that would lead to degeneration, shame and disgrace. Shame on anybody who has dipped his pen in such a black ink in the material, literary and metaphorical sense. We have before us a well-devised and well-meaning novel which was written in polished style and eloquent language and given good rendition. Thanks to its writer and translator who will be highly reputed for their good performance. We call on people to read this novel."

This had been the case even after the British occupation of Iraq, after the First World War. Knowledge of novel had then grown better as more novels became available and more people were interested in novels. This provided a favourable atmosphere for youth to develop a liking for this genre and seek to write something of the kind. The comments written on fiction during that period revealed diverse trends⁽³⁾.

There was enthusiastic inclination to write stories, clearly shown in the early writings of Mahmood Ahmed al-Sayid who gave shape to his enthusiasm in three narrative works. These stories were received remarks published by newspapers and journals on Al-Sayid's attempts to write stories. However these remarks do not reveal much understanding of fiction.

One such comment was made by *Iraq* daily on Al-Sayid's *For the Sake of Marriage*. The reviewer said, "I was given a copy of this novel which I have read with great interest. I found it worthy of high appreciation and approval for its important purpose of criticizing the bad conditions of eastern women who are deprived of their rights and social freedom. However, the book has some shortcomings, as it is expected from a budding writer. This particularly applies to the novel which we have known only recently and which demands great shrewdness and subtlety that to be able to criticise social ills. On behalf of Iraqi writers, I would like to thank the author for his spirit of enterprise and wish him success in his coming works. I hope that our writers will not spare any effort to write or translate various novels since they are a powerful re-

medy for our social ills. The West has used it to cure itself from the ills of ignorance and stagnation."

Commenting on another novel *The Destiny of the Weak*, the journal said:

"It is an Iraqi social and love novel worth reading. It was published in a good form, thanks to its active writer and publisher."

We can see in these remarks the encouragement and appreciation of people for the social implications and moral meanings which are of close association with people's life. But they made no reference to technical aspects of these stories. This attitude implied some reservation which bears the seeds of transformation to the opposite, if the novel deal with different themes. This attitude was evident in the comments made by these newspapers since the beginning. The daily *Iraq* for instance, recommended to its readers the novels which are of 'good sense and good objective.' But, it warned, "who can tell what is good and what is bad? This is because the pornographic and love novels poured out by modern printers now are so disgraceful that they can make a young man feel shy, to say nothing of girls. In my view, it is incumbent of governments to crack down the publishers of such base books and bring upon them a severe punishment like that brought upon thieves and criminals, if not severer."

This newspaper which is known for its conservative literary trend, took even a tougher attitude towards the novel, regarding it as a means to hinder development and revival. Elaborating on this idea, the daily said, "The old stories and Western novels with which our markets are filled nowadays have killed the spirit of the people in Central Asia. The more the Asians get absorbed in such novels, the more they become inactive. Some of them have lost their wit as a result of the fantasies drawn up by lovers in name only who call their myths literary, social, historical, political and love novels. Some recalcitrant people may object to this saying that novels have always been a major means to give rise to rebellions and revolutions in the East and the West and have made a major contribution to the reformation of governments and their policies. Nobody can deny such argument, but one has to ask what is useful in the modern library which is full of the novelists' nonsense that has distracted students from the acquisition of knowledge and crammed their minds with fantasies."

Such an extremist attitude towards novels and stories can be attributed to the poor quality of novels available then. This led to a mistaken understanding of novels in the 1920s— which prevented some writers from writing novels and made them renounce what they wrote early in their literary careers.

There were only few comments on the novels and short stories' collections. Their aim was no more than to encourage writers while drawing attention to the short-comings in style and language. The late 1920s

saw a turning point in fiction criticism. It was associated with the progress of the fiction writing in Iraq. The second period in the history of the Iraqi short story between the two world wars, particularly from the late 1920s to the outbreak of World War II in 1939, saw serious attempts at writing stories with the relevant techniques. This development was carried out by a group of youth who managed to set the foundations of this genre in Iraq and to have a say on many fiction works published in the 1930s.

Thus, the movement of fiction criticism in Iraq was associated with those who gave rise to fiction. You can hardly find anybody writing worthy criticism in the 1920s unless he was writing fiction. That is why the most prominent fiction critics in the 1930s were the most prominent story writers themselves as Mahmood Ahmed Al-Sayid, Anwar Shawoul, Shaloom Darwish and Abdul-Haq Fadhil.

This is because story-writing in Iraq was rather new and that only a few good works found their way to the readers. The writers were asked in most cases to clarify their attitude towards fiction and to justify their technique at a time when the literary scene was beset by chaos. This wrong impression about the story was promoted by love and adventure novels which were then abundant in Iraqi markets. This was particularly done by Al-Sayid who drew attention to the original tendencies in the Turkish fiction. Those tendencies were calling for freedom, abandonment of out-moded traditions and for fighting conservatism. He called for translating such literature. Al-Sayid also tried to give a picture of the Russian realistic literature through summing up Tolstoy's *Resurrection*. He also criticized his former way of story writing, as shown in his novels, *For the Sake of Marriage* and *Destiny of the Weak* and his collection *Catastrophes*.

He called on writers to write popular stories, following the example of such Russian writers as Turgenev, Dostoevski, Chekhov, Maxim Gorky, Tolstoy and such French writers as Emil Zola. Al-Sayid also wrote a good critical essay on the fiction works in the 1930s. He published it in *Al-Bilad* paper under the title *Dawn of the Story in Iraq*. In this essay, he said, "I have read some stories sent by young writers to *Al-Bilad* daily and found that those writers were far from grasping the essence of human spirit and its secrets as well as its hidden and inherent qualities. If we are to allow for their lack of artistic hues to colour their stories with, we cannot overlook the basic literary material of its composition." Elaborating on this point, he said, "This material may be defined by events if they are normal, by psycho and ethical analysis and by eccentric individuality. This goes for the short story. As for stories and novels, the sequence will include, the event, the protagonist, the plot and then comes psycho and ethical analysis."

This, he added, should be tinged with love and the ideals upheld by the writer. An event should be a

semi-actual one if not actual. However, the writer should not be a camera taking a picture of what happens and what he hears, because 'picture-taking' in arts, painting, music, poetry or fiction, is not an end by itself."

With such mature ideas, Al-Sayid continued to explain his understanding of realistic fiction. Then he came to interpret the reason why young story writers are visionary, "This is due to their oriental spiritual education and to the stories and tales which they, at the beginning of their youth, had read or heard from old women and men and to an environment which is too strict about virginity and virtue. However, concern over virtue and virginity is something fine but rigidity drives a young writer towards fantasy in recounting normal love affairs and towards symbolism with a view to making the affair seem honest, forgetting the sexual instinct which glows in the inner-most of a young man or woman."

Thus, he indicated, the story would be similar to those related by old women. The young writers of such stories would not hesitate to make their characters recite love poems. Others would make them feel terribly shy in a manner hardly characteristic of today's young men and women who dare to break social fetters and meet in secret, induced by glowing love. Other characters are depicted to have a strange nature. One they had a look of their beloved, they would faint after uttering some words like "Oh, I am going mad; I am dying; I am out of patience...etc."

After such analysis of fiction in Iraq in the early 1930s, Al-Sayid came to applied criticism. "Of the strangest stories published by the daily is one entitled *The Thief* in which the writer gives a picture of an event he experienced at home in the evening. He sees a ghost of a shadow which he takes for a thief and hears sounds, which he takes for the ghost's movement. His fears grow into so acute panic that he almost loses his mind. Apparently, the writer seeks to depict how fantasy takes shape in man's mind in darkness. The ghosts seemed to him to be thieves and jinns. The idea is not bad, but the writer gives a mistaken psycho-analysis. Instead of depicting his courage and showing how can fear sometimes push man to take risk and go through horrible troubles, he shows a man humiliated and intimidated by fear of a thief. This is obviously a bad example of young writers' works. An event could be actual but to give a picture of reality is not enough if it does not have a hidden call for ideals."

His applied criticism of other stories shows his realization of other aspects of the components of good fiction. Commenting on a short story entitled *A Poor Man Commits Suicide*, Al-Sayid said "Within the story there is an enthusiastic call addressed to the rich, but such calls are unwarranted by the story-writing. The contents of the story are said by its characters rather than by the writer except for the ex-

planation of events. Then the writer concludes his story with a call for building an old people's house, and thus brings the short story out of its artistic framework and makes it an ordinary article."

Al-Sayid also blames those writers who, in their stories, borrow from environments other than theirs, saying:

"What is done by those writers is strange. How can a person write about social circumstances which he has not seen? We want a national literature and not a false or a strange one."

We have quoted this article in detail because it is one of the best articles in fiction criticism throughout the 1930s and even a long time after that. He begins it with his general view of this art, defining its components, qualities and characteristics. Then, he moves to analyse why the works of his contemporary young writers are marked by certain features. His analysis reflects a profound understanding of the social and psychological circumstances in Iraq which contributed to the making of those writers and he consequently defines the qualities of their fiction works. This has made the article an important document to those who seek to study the Iraqi fiction in the 1930s.

In fact, Al-Sayid did not confine his article to what we have already mentioned. He also attempted to tackle the most important aspect of criticism. He used applied criticism in studying the stories of those young writers, revealing a sound critical perception and a great ability to pinpoint and analyze shortcomings and defects. He concluded from all this the method to be followed by young writers so as to produce original works marked by our own psyche.

The critical criteria reflected by Al-Sayid's article are not something casual in his career. He attempted to embody them in his narrative works. Those who study his works can see a steady progress in them, a progress revealing a clear technical development and scientific care particularly in his late work. We can see that he was careful to use the word story or novel in relation to his production. He described his lengthy story *Jalal Khalid* as "A Concise Iraqi Story" and for this conciseness, it is not similar to those great analytical stories which have minute details. It is close to memoirs or fiction. Talking about his story collection, *The Vanguard* he said that it is a collection of concise Iraqi pictures and narratives. As for the collection *In an Hour's Time* he described it as Iraqi pictures only.

This article shows Al-Sayid as a critic with profound critical sense, subtle understanding of many aspects of fiction and of the factors which contributed to defining the features of young writers' works. One can say therefore that he was an excellent critic and a good story writer.⁽⁴⁾

Another prominent critic who made major contribution to fiction criticism in Iraq is Abdul Haq Fadhl. His writing appeared in *Al-Majallah* journal in Mosul in the 1930s.

Fadhil tackled the most prominent Iraqi fiction works published in the late 1930s. These works were written by two story writers: Ja'far Al-Khalili who published during that period *Confessions*, *Focus of Contradictions*, *The Lost* and *Diaries*. The other writer was Thul Noon Ayoub who published six story collections up to 1939. They were as follows: *Messengers of Culture*, *The Victims*, *My Friend*, *Inspiration of Art*, *Tower of Babylon* and *The Toilers*. In his critical writings about Al-Khalili, Fadhl tried to give an objective assessment of him and that is why he did not give so much attention to his technique as to the subjects tackled by him in his stories in a particular style.

"Al-Khalili's stories are not reformatory ones,"

Fadhil said commenting on *Focus of Contradiction*. "I mean he does not probe the defects of the present and condemn them nor does he look forward to the future to drawing up ideals and principles for it. He depicts everyday life as it is or as he sees it. That is why his style was characterised by narration and calmness. It was without any enthusiasm and elegance which has an important place in story-writing," he added.

This precise assessment of Al-Khalili's stories is confirmed by Fadhl's talks on *Diaries*.

"This is another story collection by Ja'far Al-Khalili," he said in his comment on the second part of these stories. "Or rather it is a collection of interesting pictures of everyday life written at varied periods and circumstances. When you read this collection, Al-Khalili would seem to you an amateur photographer carrying his camera wandering here and there. When he catches sight of a wonderful scene, he would take a picture and keep it with other similar ones. This collection is like an album of interesting photographs pervaded by a sense of humor, though they are not free from sharp and gentle criticism."

His talk about *The Lost* was overcome by courtesy, yet a careful reader can form so mature appreciation that it would make him feel that what Al-Khalili wrote had nothing to do with the modern story technique. This is clear from the conclusion he wrote on the novel, in which he said, "The author keeps doors of philosophy wide open in the novel. He only opens them but does not go through to see what is behind nor does he close them. This makes the reader feel that the research is curtailed and that these wide open doors in his way are worthy of consideration to see what is behind them."

Abdul Haq Fadhl succeeded to a large extent in assessing Thul Noon Ayoub's stories and in indicating many of their qualities and technical characteristics.

In an article he wrote on Ayoub's fourth collection *Inspiration of Art*, he showed his impressions of Ayoub's first collection. "The second part of *Chronic Pains* was the first story of Ayoub I read in a newspaper. It enchanted me with its simple dialogue and true description. Such simplicity may not appeal to the normal reader but it is a delicate art which is diffi-

cult to attain. The great Russian novelist Tolstoy would make painstaking effort to attain it."

Thus he indicates a basic quality of Thul Noon Ayoub's style which attracted Iraqi readers more than any other story writer. Then, he comes to talk about the shortcomings which he perceived in Ayoub's narrative production, "Elegance in dialogue in Ayoub's story is rather offensive and misused; we find him in his short story *Three with Their Dog* from his collection *The Inspiration of Art* leaving his characters and addressing their dialogue to the reader himself. In the story *The Prophet* from the same collection, some person, quoting another one, relates the story in the form of a long talk as if it were a speech he knew by heart. It would be better to relate these opinions by giving the gist of the talk rather than its text."

The critic, however, underlines Ayoub's powerful observation, delicate sense, sharp temper and his strong reaction to the bad things and abuses in society in a way that would make him look indifferent to the harm which might be done by himself, to his means of living and to his reputation as a result of what he writes. Thus, he defines the general qualities and characteristics of Ayoub's stories in a way revealing profound understanding and true opinions. He, for example, said:

"The reader interested in Ayoub's literary works can easily find that he loves fiction for itself. He thinks of preparing the ideas and opinions on which he is to build up his story before thinking of the structure and plot of the story itself. Some of his stories, therefore, almost have no plot, no events and no structure. He chooses the story's style to tell the readers what he is after and therefore some of his stories are with a well-devised plot and others are just like articles."

We see that Abdul Haq Fadhl's fiction criticism is not confined to contents. His criticism discusses the problems of technical form and seeks to define the general qualities and characteristics of the works he criticizes, concluding from this good and bad things.

It should be noted that fiction criticism in Iraq, which is associated with the originators themselves, is also connected with the realities of their stories themselves. The late 1930s saw maturity in technique, particularly in Thul Noon Ayoub's and Abdul Haq Fadhl's works. It was only natural for fiction criticism to have grown mature with it at the time.

If we are to discuss the other side of fiction criticism in Iraq in the 1930s, that is to say criticism written by writers with no fiction contributions, we will find a faint picture.

You cannot find in the many newspapers and journals issued at the time something of such criticism. All that you can find is immature comments on some short story collections and novels written at the time. The purpose of those comments was no more than some definition or praise. As a whole, those com-

ments were a mere extension of what was published by newspapers and magazines in the 1920s.

Commenting on *The Euphrates Virgin* by Abdul-lah Hassan, *Al-E'tidal* journals said, "In the beautiful villages on the Euphrates, inhabited by people known for their bravery, generosity and faithfulness, various events take place every day. If they were to happen in countries other than ours, they would be recorded by the writers to remain immortal showing the way of life led by those brave Arabs and their various traditions. But, alas, such events which should be made use of, are passing with nobody taking an interest in."

This story is well-contrived, with concise style and noble purposes which call for admiration for its writer. It would be very nice of other writers in the Euphrates' areas to issue such novels which give the reader an idea of the country's affairs and people...etc."

Al-Hasid journal commented on *Messengers of Culture*, a collection by Thul Noon Ayoub, saying "the author tackles some important aspects of our social life in a daring and neat style which easily attracts the attention of readers. We urge story readers to have a copy of this collection which is available at libraries at a price of 25 fils."

In addition, there have been two attempts at fiction criticism by two writers who, to the best of my knowledge, were not known to have made narrative contribution. The first is Nikola Ameen Farah who wrote a review on the stories published in a collection entitled *The First Harvest*. The writer, as his name suggests, is not Iraqi. The article appeared in *Al-Alam Al-Arabi*. His criticism was no more than a review of the implications of the story collection and criticism of some of their ends.

As for the second attempt, which is more important it was made by Ibrahim al-Mudarris under the title, *Review and Analysis of 'My Friend' by Thul Noon Ayoub*. It was published by a special issue of *Al-Akhbar* daily. The article contains some critical notes characterised by some precision and good appreciation. At the beginning, he tried to define the nature of Ayoub's stories. He indicated that they at the first stage were intended for amusement but at the second stage, they were written to be an educational means of great significance. He thinks that a good story should have good depiction, careful observation and investigation of social life. Secondly, the good story demands narration. The first matter in the story requires a social writer while the second one requires a narrative writer.

He saw that Thul Noon Ayoub had taken care of the first matter 'since he is a social writer in the first place he writes social and critical articles in a novel mould. In my view, the writer has taken deliberate care of the essence of the social story. Through these stories, he wants to show the people what ideas and pictures he has in mind without presenting them in a

story with characters everyone of whom goes his own way. And you live with each of them until you meet them at the end point. You will keep in your imagination a great story which you can occasionally remember."

Then he came to discuss Ayoub's social opinions which he presented in his above-mentioned collection. Later he talked about one of the most important of literary points in an attempt to define the matters which had bearing on Ayoub's narrative production.

"Those stories reveal the influence of the Russian narrative school, though you can find in the third collection some diversion from reality," he said, commenting on Ayoub's three collections at that time including *Messengers of Culture*, *The Lost* and *My Friend*. "However, one can find in the collections sarcasm and bitter irony, which are typical of Russian stories. As for his style, it is like that of the English novelist Charles Dickens. It is simple and plain, helping the reader to understand the story easily."

Talking about the result which he concluded from this, he said: "In the light of these two facts, one can say that the stories of Thul Noon Ayoub are influenced by two noble spirits." "He is expected to build-up an independent career in this domain and to attain full maturity." This article is an important contribution to fiction criticism and reveals good narrative knowledge that can help the writer to say a lot of things in the field of fiction criticism but he did not.

We have referred to the most important contributions to fiction criticism in Iraq, as they appeared in heaps of newspapers and journals issued in Iraq between 1908 and 1939.

From all of this we can say that fiction criticism is associated with fiction evolution from the artistic point of view. That is why we find the post-Second World War years saw mature attempts in writing stories coupled with mature attempts in fiction criticism. The other fact underlined above is that this criticism was written at that time by the story writers themselves. If the recent years saw attempts on a larger scale at fiction criticism by writers without fiction contribution, this is because this art has taken roots in Iraq and occupied an important place among other literary genres. Indeed it has become no less important than that of poetry. The circle of its readers, writers and critics has grown wider. This is evident from the fact, that the fiction writing has recently attracted the attention of a number of university professors who started to study it methodically and scientifically. They have mostly succeeded in pointing out the trends of this art in Iraq, its currents, and in defining its most important qualities and characteristics. At the same time, they have studied the production of the prominent story writers.

Translated by Adnan Salman

Footnotes

(1) It is not the aim of this essay to give the reasons why literary criticism in Iraq was rather backward and poor because this would bring the research out of its due approach. However, we can say that this matter is to a large extent associated with the social, political and intellectual environment in Iraq. Hence, such backwardness was a general manifestation which had almost left its mark on the intellectual and creative activity as a whole in Iraq, and was not confined to literary criticism.

(2) "Beig" is a Turkish title of respect, using to address high officials.

(3) We cannot call what was written in this early period of Iraq's modern history on fiction as criticism. These writings have something to do with the story. We write them to acquaint the reader with the intellectual activity that accompanied the modern story from its beginning to maturity.

(4) Al-Sayid was born in 1901 and died in 1937 in Egypt.

A Stone Head from the City of Assur

Behnam Abu Al-Soof, Ph.D.



The beard is shown with four rows of curls on the cheek and three rows beneath the mouth

In 1978, the Antiquities and Heritage Authority began an extensive programme of excavations and restoration of the city of Assur, the capital of ancient Assyria. It is situated on a bluff on the west bank of the Tigris, about 110 kilometres south of Mosul. Today its remains are called Qalat Sherqat. It was the oldest and most sacred of Assyrian cities. It was thoroughly excavated by a German expedition (Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft) for twelve years in the beginning of the present century. The excavations exposed the town plan with its temples, palaces, walls, and gates.

Also uncovered were graves of Assyrian kings and an incomparable wealth of objects belonging to the

Sumerian, Akkadian and Assyrian periods.

In June 1982, while clearing up debris beneath the Assur temple near the Quay wall, a stone head was found. The context of the find's spot gave no stratigraphic indication of its date.

The head is made of a hard dark grey stone with white inclusions looking like diorite. Its height is 30cm., the width of the face is also 30cm. and its depth is 26cm.; thus belonging to a rather more than life-size statue. It is broken at the neck destroying the lower part of the beard, and the nose is damaged too, otherwise it is well preserved. The head is that of a bearded man. Its face is rather narrow for its



The hair is worn in a small bun and held in place by flat ribbons

height, the eyes are deep set and the eyebrows are indicated by a slight ridge. His moustache ends with large curls but with no incisions. Its beard is shown with four rows of curls on the cheek and at least three rows beneath his mouth. Below the beard curls on the cheeks are incised lines showing that originally he had a long full beard. The edge of his fringe is shown by a scalloped line but the hair of the fringe is not incised. Two ringlets hung down in front of his ears on each side. The ears are carefully and realistically carved and no ear-rings are shown. Round his head he wears a wide plain flat fillet. His hair is worn in a small bun at the back and held in place by flat ribbons which go round the top of the bun, cross just below the bun, and are also visible from beneath the fillet at the back and go down diagonally towards his neck. The hair itself at the back and on the top of his head is shown by wavy incised line of which approximately every seventh to tenth line is deeper than the others giving the impression of locks of hair. He has a straight parting in the middle of the top of his head shown by a straight incised line that cuts through the wavy lines of the hair.

The Assur head is a fine work of art clearly made by a skilled craftsman. It has considerable artistic and aesthetic merits. In order to appreciate these more fully one should place it in its context to infer something about its date and the identity of the man depicted and its function.

The hairstyle and the fillet as well as other stylistic features suggest that the head should be dated to the second half of the third or the first half of the second millennium B.C. The hairstyle is reminiscent of, though by no means identical with, the bronze head from Nineveh often attributed to Sargon of Akkad. The Assur head clearly belongs to the sculptural tradition which reached its peak in the Akkadian period. It does not, however, have the elegance and precision of the finest Akkadian works of art. Yet it is closer in spirit to the sculpture of the Ur III or even early old Babylonian periods. As the number of heads in the round or in relief discovered in Mesopotamia from the period is small and as none match exactly the iconography or style of the Assur head it would be rash to suggest at the moment a



There is no sign of ear-rings on the carefully carved ears

more emphatic opinion about its date. It is hoped however that further comment will follow the publication of such detailed photographs with this article by experts on art history and archaeology.

Since its date is uncertain we cannot identify definitely the individual depicted. It is not however a god as it does not wear a horned head-dress. From its size it must have represented a man of importance in the community and most probably represented the ruler of the city of Assur himself. The head was found in debris which probably derived from the ruins of the Assur Temple. Therefore it is possible that it belonged to a more than life-size statue of a worshipper in the temple. There are of course many other possibilities: the statue may have been brought to Assur as booty or may have come from some other buildings in Assur. But it is at least plausible that the Assur head belonged to a statue of one of the ancient Assyrian kings depicted in the act of worship of his national god Assur.

The Assyrians originally from Arabia settled in the northern part of Mesopotamia in the third millennium B.C. The earliest inhabitants of the city of Assur were subject to the Akkadian Empire and again to the kings of the Third Dynasty of Ur. After the eclipse of the Third Dynasty of Ur a line of Assyrian kings held the throne successively in an independent sovereign old Assyrian kingdom, among them were *Ilu-Shuma* who held power around 1920 B.C. He was known to have raided

deep into southern Mesopotamia to enlarge his kingdom. Another famous ancient Assyrian king was *Shamshi-Adad* (or *Shamsi-Addu*) 1815-1782 B.C., a powerful conqueror who had built up the first Assyrian Empire. It was a conquest covered the central part of the country the Eshnunna area and the province of Babylon. He also occupied Mari on the central Euphrates and appointed as viceroy his son *Yasmah-Adad*. After *Shamshi-Adad* reign, *Ham-murabi*, the famous king of Babylon appeared on the scene and led his armies to Assur subjugating it and unifying it with his vast kingdom.

The ancient Assyrian period began with the earliest phase of Assyrian history and carried through until the fall down of the First Babylonian Dynasty. There is no evidence however that Assur held any political structure during the third millennium B.C., but it was probably under direct Sumerian influence. The famous Assyrian kings-list which mentions the names of the first seventeen monarchs states that these kings "lived in tents" i.e. led a nomadic life. Yet under Akkadian suzerainty the people of Assur cooperated in organizing overland trade thus carrying Mesopotamian civilization to the countries bordering Mesopotamia from the north and west. In the *Gutian* period several Assyrian monarchs may have achieved local dominance such as *Kikia*, who constructed Assur's fortification walls, and *Ushipa*, who built a temple for the god Assur at the northern end of the city.



Contemporary Architecture in Baghdad Its Roots and Transition

Ihsan Fethi, Ph.D.

This paper attempts to trace the beginnings of modern architecture in Baghdad and then to follow its development through the past seven decades of the 20th century. Such an attempt, however, will be incomplete without outlining Baghdad's historical context. While the history of the foundation and subsequent evolution of this great Arab city is relatively well covered by Arab historians and travellers, there is practically no account yet about its more recent architectural history.

The history of Baghdad tells an eventful but turbulent story of how, incredibly, it always managed to survive despite numerous catastrophies and destructions by foreign conquests, sectarians' deeds, fires, plagues and, most notably, by the frequent and ruinous floods.

The very name of Baghdad conjures more oriental fascination than perhaps any other city in the East. This preconceived image of Baghdad is now largely and exaggeratedly associated with the fabulous stories of the Thousand and One Nights and other concocted fantasies stereotyped by Hollywood and the Western media. It may come as a great shock, therefore, to know that from the date of its foundation in AD 762 to its fall by the Mongols in 1258 — a period of some 5 centuries — only 8 Abbasid buildings remain today. Only 4 of which can be safely considered as historically authentic, while the rest have been substantially modified over time.

In fact, from its foundation in 762 until 1869, when the reformist Wali of Baghdad, Midhat Pasha started several major modernization projects in the city, a period spanning over 1100 years, only 34 major historic monuments remain. The loss of Baghdad's architectural heritage has been, therefore, so overwhelming that it makes it quite difficult to formulate satisfactorily convincing conclusions about historic architecture of Baghdad. Yet, what remains, albeit only a few examples, give more than a small hint of the sophisticated and beautiful architecture which was achieved. Other extant ex-

amples of Abbasid buildings and archaeological sites elsewhere in Iraq, especially Samarra, together with contemporary references, serve to substantiate comparative evidence.

Tragically, of the famous Round City, which is the 'original' Baghdad, nothing has survived except, perhaps, the carved marble prayer niche (mihrab) found at the Khasaki Mosque. It was attributed to Mansur's Mosque by some architectural historians and is now exhibited in the Iraqi Museum. However, this attribution, although likely, is by no means conclusive. The site of the Round City is known with reasonable approximation but is now quite heavily urbanized. Some of its remains must surely be lying under what is now known as the districts of Shalchiya and Utaifiya. Curiously, no attempt has been taken to uncover what must be the most impressive town planning example in the Islamic World.

The Second Abbasid Caliph, Mansur (762-775), built Baghdad in 762 on a strategic site near the western banks of the Tigris. According to Arab historians, it was perfectly circular, consisting of three concentric zones separated by three walls and crossed by four main roads radiating from its centre, where the Caliph's Palace and Mosque were located, and leading towards four equally spaced gates. The space between the inner middle walls was divided into four equal residential quadrants by long vaulted markets (suqs).

Although there were several circular towns preceding Baghdad, none of them could claim the supreme geometry and powerful simplicity of its plan and monumental architecture. It is a most imaginative interpretation of the centrality of the very capital of the Abbasid Empire, and could even be regarded as a cosmological statement of metaphysical and extraordinary vision.

The limited physical size of this citadel-like city, which enclosed an area of about 550 ha, resulted in a rapid extramural expansion that soon crossed the river when Mahdi, the Caliph's son, settled his army

in AD 768. This move eventually led to the shift of the centre of gravity to the east bank, and by the middle of the tenth century the seat of the Caliphate itself was fully established in what later became known as Rusafa.

Therefore, the term 'old Baghdad' is now used to describe partly what survives today from Rusafa and partly from Karkh - a smaller settlement that continued to be inhabited since the foundation of Baghdad and even before that.

Consequently, it is important to emphasise that the Round City survived only about three centuries and, since the 12th century, the essential morphological pattern and structure of Rusafa remained largely unchanged until the first decade of the 20th century. Urban developments and other changes took place mostly within the city walls which also served as a protection against flooding. In fact, it was not until 1956 that the danger of flooding finally ceased when the Tharthar Dam was completed thereby facilitating a great opportunity for major urban expansion.

So, what is the architecture of Baghdad? And what are its essential characteristics? The answer to these questions is not an easy one and is fraught with complications. First, the history of Baghdad shows an incredible mix of cultural influences ranging from pre-Islamic Mesopotamian, to Sassanian, Abbasid, Buwaihid, Seljuqid, Mongolian, Torkoman, Safavid and Ottoman. Second, as was stated earlier, so few historic monuments remain from these periods, especially from earlier ones, that it renders it almost impossible to define with any reasonable degree of accuracy the extent of these influences on the Abbasid architecture of Baghdad.

Nevertheless, available evidence, comparative as well as contemporary accounts, suggests some broad observations and characteristics. One broad and very safe generalisation is that the architecture of Baghdad is most definitely based on the ingenious use of brick. Since millennia Mesopotamian builders invented the baked brick as a means to compensate for the lack of more durable building materials such as stone. Consequently, the use of brick reached unsurpassed sophistication and resourcefulness, and eventually stretched to its utmost limits of geometric perfection in Muqarnas and decorative brickwork. Equally, colourful glazed tiles, also a Mesopotamian invention, provided a superbly brilliant and practical finish for walls and domes in an environment that is known for its climatic hostility, dull colour, and almost featureless topography. Thus, on the material level, the architecture of Baghdad has an aesthetic aspect based largely on typical creamy-yellow brickwork enhanced by the use of glazed tiles most commonly in turquoise colour.

Another definite generalisation is the common use of the Iwan (Hiri) type-plan coupled with the use of internal open courtyards and inter-connected courtyards usually axially planned and dispositioned within a simple overall geometrical composition. In other words, in term of plan, the typical theme was the creation of a series of spatial patterns and graduations based on introversion. In terms of form, consequently, the architecture was largely solid and pierced vertically by small openings (in walls) and horizontally by large openings over courtyards (in roofs).

The architecture of 'old Baghdad' today essential-

ly adheres to these generalizations but not without some significant stylistic modifications. By far the overwhelming majority of historic fabric, mostly brick and timber houses, belongs to the later Ottoman period of the 19th Century. Due to climatic and socio-religious reasons domestic architecture seems to have experienced fewer typological changes than stylistic ones. The typical plan of a traditional house in Baghdad continued to be based on the internal courtyard arrangement with a colonnaded upper gallery, in which there is a strong tendency for symmetry and clean geometry despite the irregularity of the land plot and the labyrinthine urban pattern.

Additionally, domestic architecture in particular, shows an interesting preoccupation with aesthetic considerations, often at the expense of functional arrangements. This may be explained by the fact that 'space' and 'use' were not regarded as fixed correlates. In other words, when planning the functional arrangements of the house, rooms and other enclosed spaces such as the iwan and the courtyard were not conceived to have any fixed or designated use. There was no concept of a specific space allocated for dining or living or sleeping. The inhabitants simply moved from room to room depending largely on seasonal and daily thermal comfort considerations. Thus they slept in underground basements in the afternoons and on the roofs at night in summer and so on. Another factor which helped this internal 'migratory' behaviour was the non-existence of purpose-made furniture. 'Furniture' was either architecturalised-i.e. built in, or was floor-based and easy to carry such as mattresses and cushions.

Consequently, in the absence of rigid space-use correlation, formal and aesthetic consideration took increased importance. In a way, therefore, form in domestic architecture was much more important than function, because function was largely stereotyped and multi-purposeful.

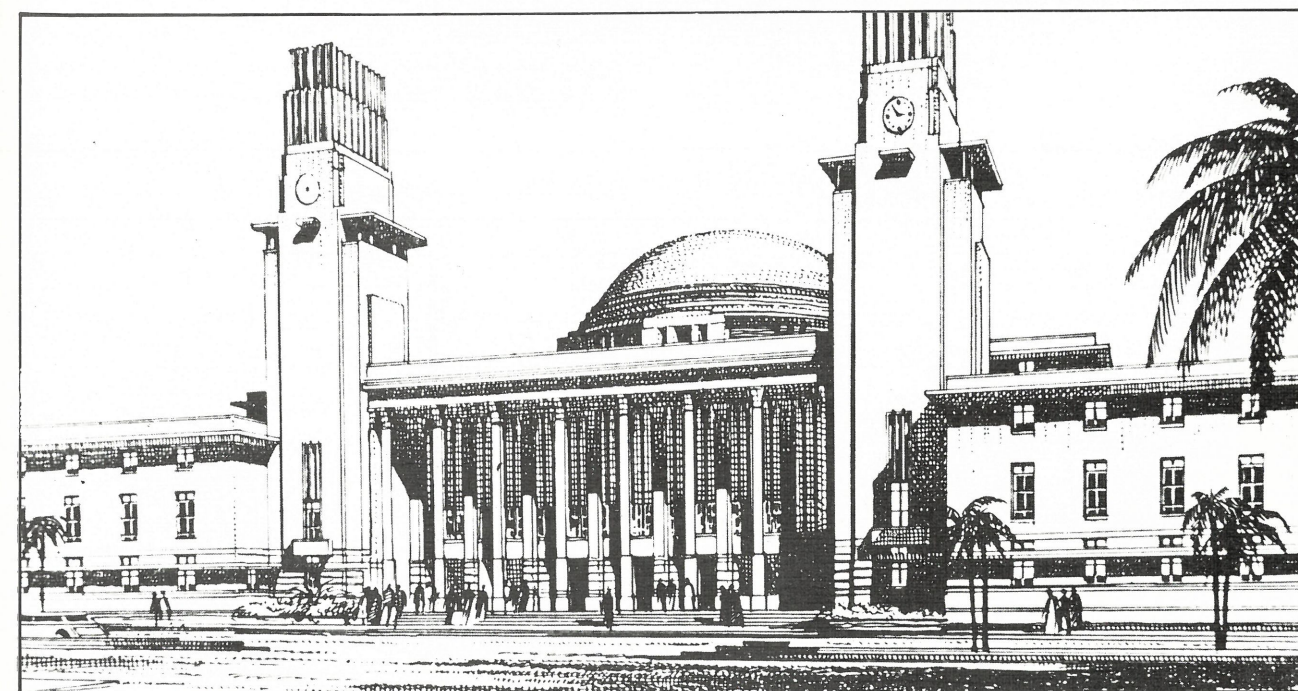
After the fall of Baghdad in 1258 the city was reduced to an insignificant town. However, foreign influences throughout the following three centuries seem to have been notably rejected by the builders of Baghdad. Essentially, therefore, Abbasid architecture continued its momentum and its overall characteristics were maintained. The Ottoman period, in contrast, resulted in several major typological changes, especially in mosque design. Abbasid mosques very closely followed the established Arab hypostyle plan. During the Ottoman period the mosques of Baghdad changed to the dome-mosque type; where instead of columnar prayer halls, a dominant dome covered the central area.

Turkish influences on domestic architecture is less evident in typological terms. Stylistic changes seem to have been more welcome. In particular, the use of timber for the upper floor, columns, doors and windows, was greatly intensified. In addition, there were obvious changes in decoration from the abstract geometric to the more floral and later more rococo patterns and motifs.

Thus, Baghdad continued its stagnant and lazy pace under the Turkish rule until Midhat Pasha's appointment as governor of the Baghdad Wilayat in 1869. His short reign (1869-1871) witnessed several fundamental modernisation moves that were to have an ever-lasting influence on the future course of the city. Of major importance was his decision to



Cooper, Royal Mausoleum, 1934-1936.



Wilson and Mason, The International Railway Station in Baghdad 1947-1951.

demolish the walls of Rusafa, though he left the gates intact, and the building of numerous and large public buildings, and the introduction of modern municipal services and new roads.

The Sarai Building and Qushla Clock-Tower (1869) were monumental buildings that created a major impact not only on the sky-line of the city but also introduced foreign western architectural styles for the first time. The Sarai, which was nearly 200 metres in length - almost twice the length of Mustansiriya Madrasa which was hitherto the biggest public building in Baghdad, included the concept of a 'closed' building (no courtyard) as well as the Greek pediment motif. The municipality building was built to resemble a typical closed western monument and even the Sarai Madrasa for the orphans shows some disregard to the established enclosed courtyard typology.

The latter Turkish period also witnessed the gradual introduction of western furniture which resulted in a major rethinking of the concept of space-use in houses. Thus by the early 20th Century, courtyard-less villas began to appear and were designed to have spaces allocated for specific functions.

Another major influence took place when, in collaboration with the Turkish authorities, the Germans constructed a railway line connecting Europe to Baghdad in 1915. German engineers introduced the use of I-steel joists for shallow brick-arching, known as Jack-arch construction. This method was quickly taken by local masons because it offered a quicker, cheaper, and a more durable building technique. The Germans also built two large three-storey buildings in Salhiya railway district, which, among other things, introduced the use of steel, timber and local brick together in frame construction, and reinforced the concept of a closed building with frontal porch, the use of external balconies, and pitched roof.

The British occupation of Iraq, which began in 1915 and ended in 1918, marks a very important turning point in the modern history of Iraq. The British Administration began major infrastructural and public works to consolidate their rule. The establishment of the Kingdom of Iraq in 1921 marked the beginning of the National Era. With king Faisal I, Iraq embarked upon a slow but ambitious development programme, with Baghdad taking the lion's share. However Iraq remained under British Mandate until 1932 when it became a full member of the League of Nations. Oil was discovered in large quantities in Kirkuk in 1927, but it was not until 1934 the oil exports were made and the country's revenues set off a dynamic process of modernisation.

During the British Period (1915-1932), two British architects played a major role in the modernisation

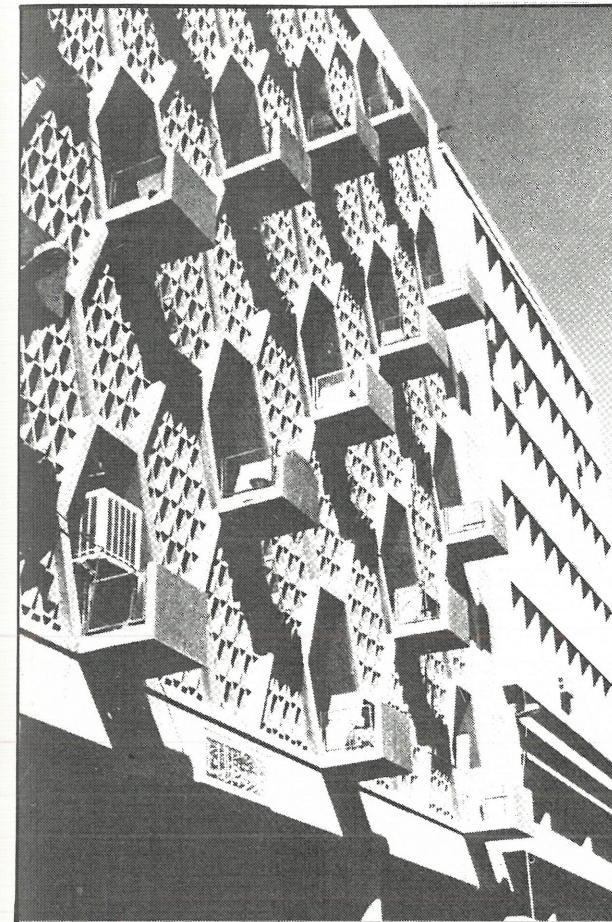
of architecture in Iraq. In separate as well as joint efforts, J.M. Wilson (1887-1965) and H.C. Mason (1892-1960), produced numerous public buildings that were to influence the local architectural scene. Wilson became the first Director of Public Works in Iraq and among his finest projects is the Aal al-Bait University (1922-1924) in Aadhamiya, Baghdad. Wilson had been one of Sir Edwin Lutyen's assistants in New Delhi in 1925 and his designs show Lutyen's influence and a remarkable mastery of local traditional building techniques and materials. His buildings in Iraq are based on an elegant synthesis between Islamic architecture and western classicism. Of particular interest was his disciplined symmetrical designs, the use of a dominant central dome and gateway, and the intricate use and detailing of local brick. Another masterpiece, which was never built, was his superb design for the Palace of King Faisal in 1927.

Mason, who studied at Liverpool University under Professor Reilly, became assistant Government Architect in Baghdad under Wilson in 1920. Most of his work in Iraq was in partnership with Wilson. His own designs, however, do not show the same maturity, elegance, and the regional architectural flavour as when he designed with Wilson. His outstanding individual designs are the Post and Telegraph Office (1929), Baghdad Airport Terminal (1931) and The Royal Villa Harthiya (1933). All these buildings exhibit a remarkable disregard to local traditions and use western motifs very liberally and even eclectically, including classic orders, pediments, and pitched roofs.

Together, however, Wilson and Mason seem to have managed to marry their experiences and synthesise an impressive approach to public architecture in Iraq. Their examples are too numerous to list here but outstanding ones include the General Maude Memorial Hospital in Basra (1921) which is their first design in Iraq; the Royal Office in Baghdad (1923) - now demolished; St. Georges Church (1926); Basra Port Authority Headquarters (1929); Basra Airport (1931); and lastly what must be their real masterpiece, Baghdad's International Railway Station (1947-1951).

Another influential British architect was J.B. Cooper, and whose work in Baghdad started in the mid 1930s. His style may be viewed as similar to that of Wilson but slightly more western and less influenced by traditional architecture in Baghdad. The exception in this generalization is the Royal Mausoleum (1934/1936) which, by necessity of its function and direction of the Iraqi client, was essentially an Islamic monument. His other notable buildings are: the College of Engineering (1937); the Presidential Palace and Parliament (1957-1959).

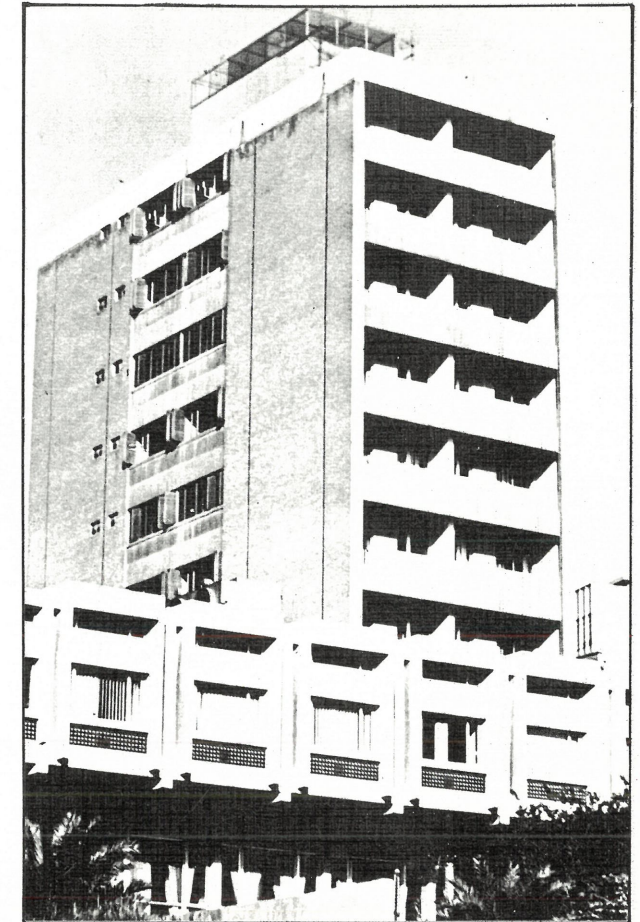
In the meantime, the Iraqi Government had sent several students to study architecture in England in



Abdulla Ihsan, Khan al-Pasha Building, 1957.

the early 1930s. The first Iraqi architect, Ahmad Mukhtar (1907-1960) graduated from Liverpool in 1936, became Government Architect in 1937 and Director of Public Works in 1952. Another architect, Hazim Namiq (b. 1911) studied architecture in Cardiff, graduated also in 1936, and worked closely with Mukhtar in the Public Works Department. Two other architects, Midhat Madhloom (1913-1973) and Jaafar Allawi (b. 1915) graduated from Liverpool both in 1939. More Iraqi architects quickly followed, notably Makiya (b. 1917), Abdulla Ihsan (b. 1919), Madfai (b. 1927), Awni (1926-1971), Chadirji (b. 1926), Husham Munir (b. 1930), and Hasani, and by 1956 there were about 30 architects in Iraq.

A full and comprehensive analysis of the role and contribution of each of these Iraqi architects is beyond the scope of this paper. However it is necessary to draw some broad conclusions in order to trace the course of contemporary architecture in Baghdad during the last four decades. One factor to realize at the outset is that Iraqi pioneer architects fall into 4 training groups: the British (Liverpool and Cardiff); the American (Texas and California); and the Egyptian. Naturally, this grouping had a marked influence on the evolution of Iraqi architecture,



Husham Munir, Baghdad Chamber of Commerce, 1963.

because, among other things, architects tend to rely on their training and educational experience, especially during their formative years of practice. The fourth group is Iraqi trained and, by now, they represent by far the majority of the 1500 Iraqi architects in the country.

The last years of the 1930s, just before the outbreak of the Second World War, witnessed a notable acceleration in the building programme by the Public Works Department as well as other governmental bodies. During this crucial period, domestic architecture changed and was transformed dramatically. The introvert Baghdadi house gave way to the semi-extrovert house and the urban pattern changed completely from the contiguous organic to the terraced and detached grid-iron. The open courtyard was converted into a covered central hall and external windows, balconies and frontal porches became fashionable especially in villas in the newly developed districts of Sinak, Battaween, Alwaziya, Waziriya and to a lesser extent in Karkh.

This period also saw the introduction of new building materials and constructional techniques. Murdoch and Brooks Company played an important role in this development. Around 1937 or 1938 it

introduced artificial stone, produced the first prime-quality plaster, discovered good quality sand in Habbaniya and set up the first modern brick factory. Architectural elements such as iron windows, doors, toilet accessories, lighting fixtures, gutters, were however imported mostly from Britain.

During the first three decades of this century, the overwhelming majority of public buildings, though designed by British architects, were built by local contractors employing master masons (Ustas). Baghdadi master-masons were naturally familiar with local building materials, and techniques. Wilson, Mason, Cooper and Jackson, all relied very heavily on the supreme building skills of these largely uncredited masters. Indeed, one may even claim that without them, these British architects would certainly have not been able to produce such distinguished workmanship and detailing. The same applies to Badri Qadah, a Syrian architect who worked in Baghdad in the 1930s.

Of the first four Iraqi architects of this period Midhat Madhloom (1913-1973) was the most experimental. Mukhtar's work was mostly confined to official architecture by the Public Works Department. Notable examples include: the Olympic Sports Club, Post Office in Aadhamiya, and the Nursing Home for the Royal Hospital. He never set up his own private practice and because of his continuous bad health, his private work was consequently minimal. Notable examples of his private work include his beautiful Spanish-style villa in Saadun district, Hakim Hotel, Tigris Palace Hotel, and Firdaws Cinema, all of which are still extant.

Hazim Namiq (b. 1911) worked almost exclusively for the Public Works Department too until he set up his own private practice in 1958 in partnership with Fadhil Lazar and Hazim al-Tak. Midhat Madhloom, on the other hand, was more artistically inclined of these four and had a distinguished career in his later years especially in the Arab Gulf States. He worked briefly for the Awqaf and was exiled for 3 years to Rhodesia by the British after the Gailani Coup in 1941. His private work includes Qadri Cinema, Tuwaitha Hospital, Amana Swimming Pool, and Soffir Building in Rashid Street. Jaafar Allawi (b. 1915), who graduated on the same day as Madhloom from Liverpool University, never managed to get a substantial commission until the 1950s, despite the fact that he was the first Iraqi architect to set up a private practice in 1946.

The architecture produced by these four pioneers was very clearly western-oriented and largely followed the international trend. All their work produced in this period shows almost a total disregard to local tradition and cultural context. However, their work also shows a masterful understanding of workmanship and detailing, especially in Allawi's case, reflecting the emphasis of their respective

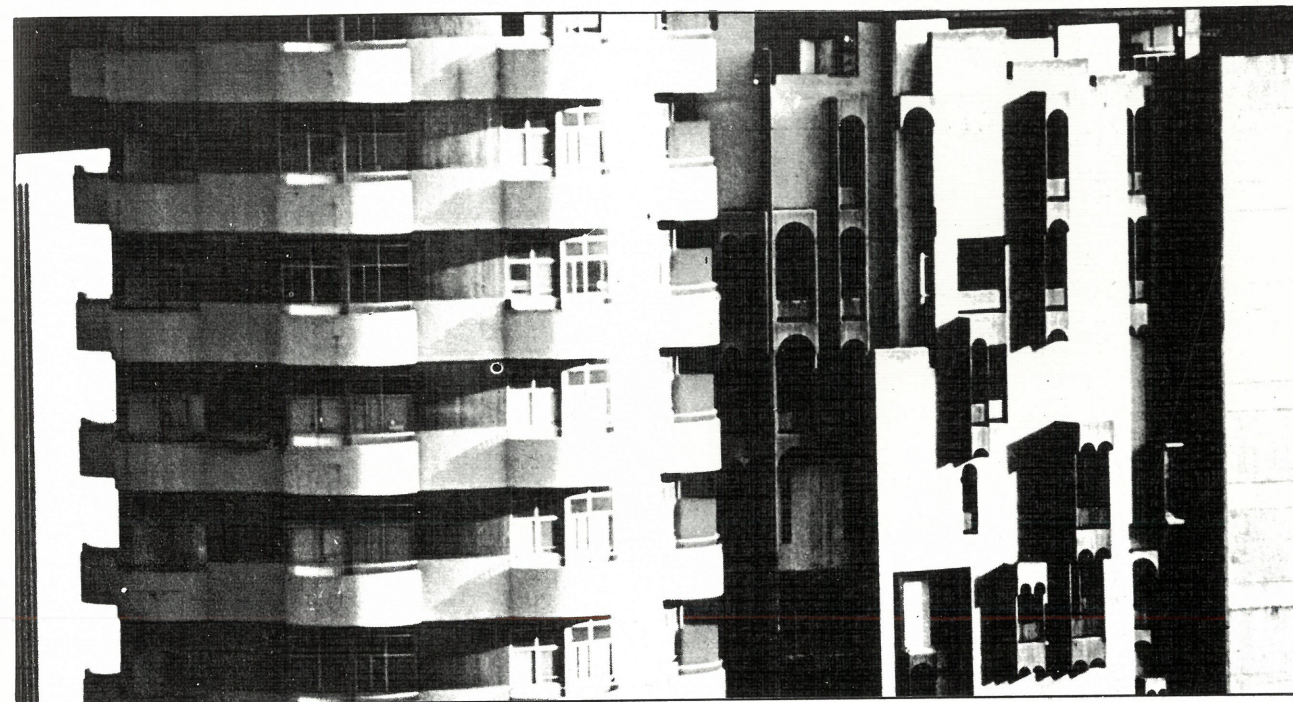
schools on this aspect of design.

The 1940s was a difficult period for architects because of internal political upheavals and the Second World War. The four architects who returned to Iraq, Makiya (b.1917), Abdulla Ihsan (b. 1919), Jalili (b. 1923), and Said Madhloom (b. 1920), essentially followed the same style of their Iraqi predecessors. This period witnessed a notable decline in the role of master masons, a slow introduction of reinforced concrete technology, cement rendering which was hitherto rejected by perfectionist masons, and the introduction of pre-fab roofing system by Allawi and Makhzoumi in 1949.

The 1950s were a period of intense and rapid development. Oil revenues as from 1952 suddenly went up significantly, when a 50-50 agreement was concluded with the foreign-owned Iraq Petroleum Company. From ID 3 million in 1949 oil revenues shot up to ID 50 million in 1953. With large funds thus available to the central government, the Development Board, that had been founded in 1950 to implement large-scale industrial, agricultural and infrastructural projects, could go ahead with its ambitious plans. Baghdad suddenly became the hub of activity and a magnet for business opportunities attracting hundreds of foreign businessmen, engineers and architects. On account of architectural contribution and quantity of production the 1950s can be easily judged as the most significant. However, the quality of architecture produced by most Iraqi architects, who now numbered nearly 30, is negative and regrettable. It was a period during which westernisation took an accelerated pace and this overwhelming phenomena was very clearly reflected in architecture. It may be considered as a hasty experimental phase during which Iraqi architects abandoned their cultural roots in favour of catching up with the western bandwagon.

Perhaps the only notable positive architectural trend was the beginning of the use by some architects, in particular Midhat, Abdulla, Chadirji and Munir, of sun-shading devices such as breakers and louvres. This was attempted partly to minimise heat-gain and partly in response to what Le Corbusier, Gropius, and Niemeyer had been doing abroad. It should also be noted that full air-conditioning systems were still uncommon in Iraq. This gave the architecture of the 1950's its now familiar, quite monotonous, and drab 'brise soleil' look.

In the mid 1950s the Development Board invited several world-famous architects to participate in the building boom. These included: Frank Lloyd Wright who produced some dreamy schemes for Baghdad University and Opera; La Corbusier was commissioned to design a Sports Complex (completed in 1979); Alvar Aalto designed a Museum of Fine Arts and Post Office; Walter Gropius (T.A.C.) designed a



Contrasting Styles in Baghdad, Hazim Namiq and Chadirji.

huge Complex for the University of Baghdad (still under construction); and Doxiadis Associates were asked to prepare tens of master plans and housing schemes all over the country.

Other less-known foreign architects included: Captain Philip Hirst, who worked for the Railway Authority, and designed the 15-Storey Rafidain Bank, The Ottoman Bank and the Kadhimiya Textile Factory; Ellen Jawdat designed the Red Crescent Building; Hans Muller designed Baghdad Hotel; Ritche and Khammo designed Baghdad Bank; Platinov designed a Student Hostel; Adler and Partners designed the Badawi Building in Rashid Street. None of these buildings is of any distinction.

Architectural examples by Iraqi architects in the fifties enforce the conclusion that most of them had not given any serious consideration to Iraq's cultural heritage and did very little to protect it let alone use it as a source for inspiration. Without any exception, the following examples represent a regrettable and regressive development for Iraqi architecture. They show that even those architects who succeeded in the following decade to develop their own school of design distinguished for its attempts to create locally and regionally identifiable architecture such as Chadirji, Makiya and Awni, had not yet truly understood the necessity of 'localising' their architecture.

In this context, Iraqi artists such Jewad Selim and others, were way ahead of architects, and this was despite the fact that these architects were in constant

contact and almost daily arguments with artists who succeeded in evolving several distinctive schools of painting.

These examples include: Makiya's Regent Palace Hotel (1952); Allawi's Hariri School (1952) and Mirjan Building (1954); Allawi and Abdulla Ihsan's Agricultural Bank (1951); Chadirji's Shorbachi Building (1952) and the Unknown Soldier's Monument (1960 and demolished in 1982); Madfai's Samarai Building (1957); Abdulla Ihsan's Khan al-Pasha Building (1957); Awni's Firdaws Hospital (1955); the Mortgage (Ruhoon) Bank designed by Chadirji, Abdulla, Madfai and Awni (1954); And Midhat Madhloom and Husham Munir's Cafe 14th July (58/59). Examples of private houses are excluded because they are too numerous to mention and deserve a special study in their own right.

The Fifties marked other major events which were to directly affect the course of architecture in the sixties, regarded by many as the Golden Age of contemporary architecture in Iraq. In 1952 the first Cement Factory was opened and thus offered a greater momentum for reinforced concrete to be used more widely. The 1958 July Revolution created probably the most significant impact on Iraqi architecture because not only the strong ties with the west were suddenly shattered, but also it created tremendous pride and nationalism. This was immediately reflected in the plastic arts as well as in architecture.

A strong sense of nationalist pride results in an attempt to create symbolically identifiable local

architecture that is based on and inspired by local cultural roots. In 1959 the Iraqi Union of Engineers was founded and included architects. The same year witnessed the creation of the first Department of Architecture in Iraq due to the efforts of Munir, Makiya and Abdulla and helped also by Chadirji and Awni. Towards the close of 1950s, the role of the architect became more clear and more appreciated by other professionals especially by civil engineers.

The early Sixties witnessed a sharp upward turn in urban development in the country. Rural to urban migration intensified and Baghdad began to experience a dramatic growth in population as well as physical size. Urban sprawl began to appear on a massive scale, largely in the form of modern suburbs subdivided and given at nominal prices to members of numerous professional societies. In the meantime, developmental pressures on the old centre of the city, Rusafa, increased markedly and large areas of its old fabric were in fact erased completely in the Fifties and Sixties.

This economic boom created a huge opportunity for architects to design large-scale buildings such as offices, schools, factories and hospitals. Consequently Iraqi architectural firms, which numbered about 10, were flooded with commissions. From 1964, when the first group of architects graduated from Baghdad University, to 1970, some 115 graduated and thus were immediately employed by these firms mostly on a part-time basis. The importance of these Iraqi graduates should not be underestimated. At one time some firms, notably Chadirji's (Iraq Consult) and Munir's (Husham Munir and Associates), employed over 100 people reflecting the huge volume of work undertaken.

What may be termed as the 'Fourth Generation' architects included some brilliant and dynamic young talent. They provided the fresh blood much-needed for the revitalisation of these established firms and, in turn, they benefited greatly from the patronage of their Iraqi masters.

These young architects who included: Attila Dhia al-Din; Khachak Garabait; Saad al-Zubaidi; Wijdan Mahir; Mahmoud al-Ali; Yousif Dauod; Akram al-Uqaili; Mizhir al-Saadi; and Aram Zakarian to name but a few, played an important but yet uncredited role in the renaissance of Iraqi architecture in the Sixties. Another group which may also be categorised as Fourth General consisted of several architects who returned from abroad after their graduation in the early Sixties. Although they worked for governmental bodies such as the Directorate of Public Works in daytime they found evening work in private firms more rewarding. These architects included Maath Alusi who played an important role in 'Iraq Consult', Henri Zvoboda, Fuad Othman, Ibrahim Allawi; and Yasir Hikmat.

Some of the architects eventually opened their own firms and became successful in their own right.

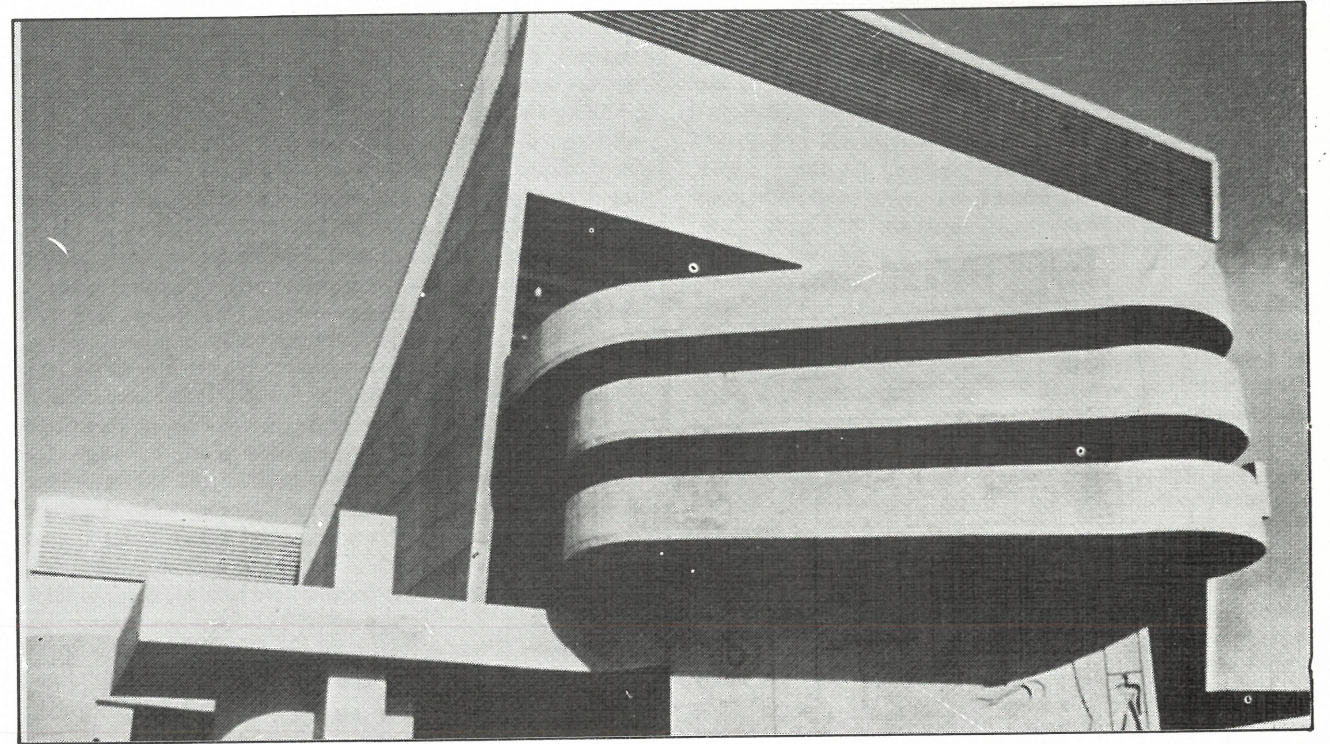
What about the influence of foreign architects on the architecture of the Sixties? Well, I think that their contribution should also be credited. Two factors should be mentioned here. First, the influence of a handful of Polish architects who taught at the Department of Architecture should be credited to Basta and Jan Ceika who played a significant role in Makiya's firm. Others included Alexander Makouitch and his architect wife, Robatchinky and Biota Gerhard, all of whom worked for Qahtan Awni and with him produced the impressive modern, yet distinctive, University of Mustansiriyah.

Second, is the significant impact of the lectures and visits of Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, and Walter Gropius. All of them appreciated the wealth of Islamic architectural heritage of Iraq and advocated that Iraqi architects should reject western models and stand to develop their own vocabulary. This impact was particularly evident on Chadirji who soon afterwards, around 1961/62, abandoned his previous line and started to develop his highly distinctive style. Chadirji now began to use local brick and concrete in fair-face technique, and turquoise wooden shutters. In his entry for the Ministry of Municipalities Competition in 1965 he used his now familiar round arches for the first time.

From then on Chadirji's contribution to the evolution of a local school of design is very impressive indeed. His new style provided an obvious link with the past, with the essence of Abbasid architecture - in its treatment of materials, climate and light. He created several works which still represent the most serious and creative attempts in Iraq. Such examples include: The Iraqi Academy (1965); Tobacco Monopoly (1966); Federation of Industries Building (1966); Alwiya Building (1969).

In the revitalisation of Iraqi architecture Chadirji has been the pioneer. The work of other architects was naturally influenced by this new development. Awni's Mustansiriyah (1963) and Electricity Board (1968) are two masterful creations. Awni's early death in 1972 was therefore a serious blow to Iraqi architecture. Makiya's work began to take a distinctively 'Islamic' flavour with Khulafa Mosque (1963). Other distinguished works in Baghdad include: College of Theology (1966); and Awqaf Public Library (1967). His firm's more interesting work, however, is elsewhere in the country.

Madfai seems to have resisted this new movement. Most of his work, though interesting in form and structure lacked, however, consistency and identifiable character. In other words, he could not develop a personal style and every building was to him a new experiment. The only example in which he had to confront this question face to face was the Buniya Mosque (1964 opened 1971). Even here, he



Le Corbusier, Saddam Indoor Sport Hall, 1975-1979.

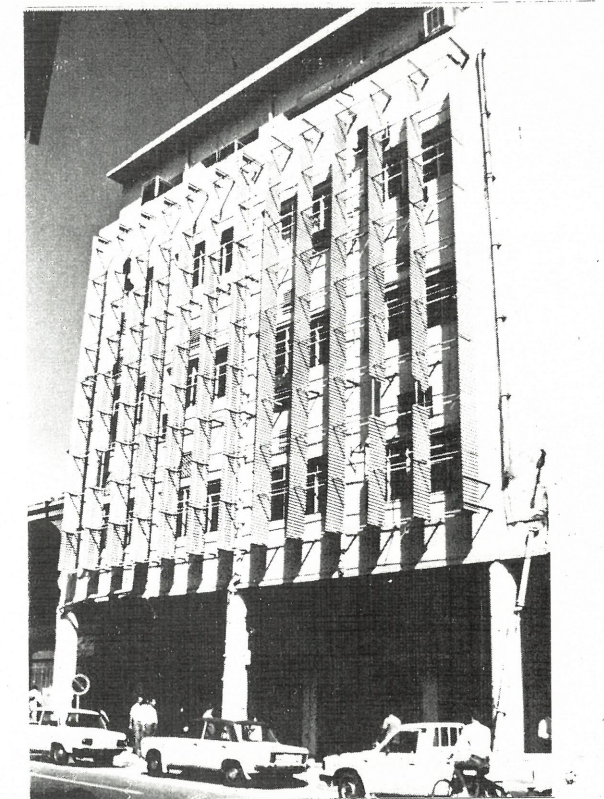
seems unsure of what a Baghdadi mosque should look like.

Husham Munir's work, on the other hand, shows that in the Sixties he began to react to the new movement - though not whole-heartedly. His work with Madhloom on Baghdad University with Walter Gropius had influenced his style very clearly. Munir's work, however, has a distinctive style, though not necessarily of 'Islamic' character. His style may be described as 'correct' and elegant, well composed in terms of form and mass but lacks strong visual excitement.

Often, Munir's work is judged as nothing more than anonymous international. I believe that this judgement is superficial and very unfair. Because if one studies his designs more closely one would discover an inherent quality and consistency. This applies, in particular, to the attention he pays to climatic considerations, finishes and detailing. Munir also deserves a major credit in involving Iraqi artists in his work. Outstanding examples of his work include; Ministry of Awqaf (1961); Al-Salam Palace (1964), and Pharmaceutical College (1965).

In conclusion, personally, I believe that the Sixties represent a pinnacle in the history of modern architecture in Iraq. It, therefore, seems more appropriate to stop here. The Seventies were on the whole, a dull period in which architecture declined significantly. To assess or judge the Eighties would perhaps be too premature. For a brief glimpse in the Sixties architecture flowered and there was much hope. Could Baghdad, once again, set the pace and

quality of architecture in the Arab World? Given the right objective conditions and active official support, I strongly believe that the Iraqi architect will prove capable of producing an architecture not unlike the masterpieces of his great Abbasid Fathers.



Midhat Madhloom, Thiaker Building 1951-52.

Jewad Selim and Al-Sayyab Meeting on Common Ground

Majid S. al-Samarraie

Baghdad in the mid 1940s was beaming with life. Describing it in his diary of November 16, 1944, Jewad Selim one of Iraq's pioneer artists wrote: "Many people came to Baghdad⁽¹⁾ in this period from Europe where they were denied the opportunity of being productive. Unlike Europe, Baghdad paved the way for them to work and opened for the artist among them a new realm of visible things under its picturesque domes."

That period involved many intellectual and political trends which contributed to the enhancement of a 'fundamental development' of thought in Iraq. These trends had influenced the pioneers of modernism which gave rise to two big names, noted for their great part in this movement in the country, namely Jewad Selim in art and Badr Shakir al-Sayyab in poetry. They pushed themselves forward in life and creativity, proceeding from a "common ground" as far as the founts from which they derived their "elementary material" are concerned.

The stages of the careers of Jewad Selim and Badr Shakir al-Sayyab extended from the early 1950s to the early 1960s when Selim executed the most notable work of art in the history of modern art in Iraq, namely the *Monument of Liberty* and when Al-Sayyab finished his most notable poetic work *The Song of Rain*.

Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, a literary and art critic, holds that Selim's art had undergone three important stages, from 1951, when the Baghdad Group for Modern Art was founded, to 1958. During this period, he developed a style and character of his own. At the first stage, which was short, Selim used a style close to abstraction, particularly in sculpture, taking the shape of crescent as a basis for sophisticated subjects. He also used the ox, a symbol of Iraq's agricultural life, and motherhood as two important objects. But later the "crescent" brought him back, this time with vehemence, to the idea of Arab art, and thus the second stage of his career was initiated. He also richly used the crescent shape in popular subjects. At first, he resorted to soft colours which are not deeply contrasted, to stress the value of painting, recalling ancient brass saucers.

Suddenly, Selim recalled his old love of Al-Wasiti, using bright shades in his crescent patterns as in the painting *Music in the Street* in which popular Iraqi

subjects were mixed with the painter's ideas of the essence of Arab art. He derived from the ancient manuscripts and Arabic calligraphy a new impetus. He made use of the tales of the Arabian Nights about women's intrigues, knights and their horses and produced a series of paintings which varied in size and time and called them *Al-Baghdadiyat*. *The Murdered Tree* is one of these paintings which represents the culmination of the Arab aspect of Selim's career in painting.

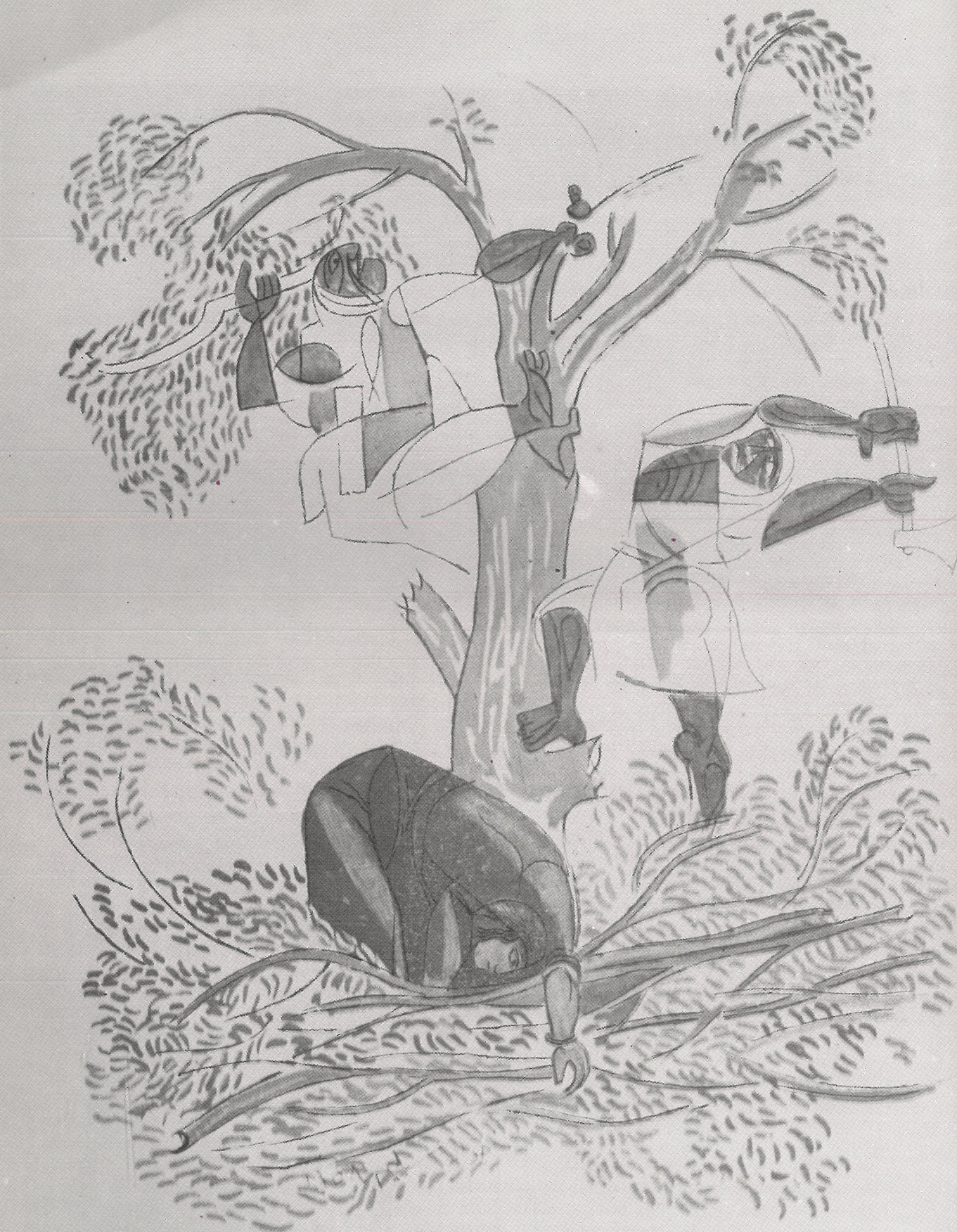
As for Al-Sayyab, we can observe in his collection *The Song of Rain* more than one stage in relation to vision and expression. There is "the realistic stage" which is evident from poems such as *Weapons and Children*, *The Blind Prostitute*, *Grave-digger*, *the Caravan of Estrangement*, etc. There is also the stage where reality and "existentialist-cum-humanitarian-cum-national" concerns are mixed. Thus, his verse took on a new dimension, bringing the poet out of the limited confines where he found himself at the beginning. At this stage, Al-Sayyab turned from "political concern" in its direct sense to what we can call 'delving into reality.'

His "symbols" can be traced back to Mesopotamia and to the Christian idea of sacrifice and salvation of mankind. By then, Al-Sayyab wrote such notable poems as *Stranger at the Gulf*, *River and Death*, *The Song of Rain*, *In the Arab Maghrib*, *Christ After Crucifixion* and *The Detective*.

The third stage in that collection can be called "The Tammuz Stage" which was marked by a turn towards myths and symbols, most of which were derived from the Iraqi mythology and some others were created by the poet himself from his personal legacy. His sense of estrangement from town grew tense. This stage can be regarded as extension of the previous ones.

The exceptional position occupied by Badr Shakir al-Sayyab in poetry and Jewad Selim in painting and sculpture can be attributed to the unique experiences of each, which formed the main stay of what was achieved later within the movement of modernism, whether in poetry or in arts. The modernity they sought was based on a "new vision" and a "new philosophy" responsive to the new realities of their time.

Al-Sayyab was born in the village of Jaikour in Basra in 1925. He joined the Teachers' Training College



The Murdered Tree, Jewad Selim, 1958.

and graduated from its English Department. He worked as a journalist, writer and translator and teacher of English at secondary schools. Then, he was appointed at the Ministry of Trade and later transferred to the Iraqi Ports Authority in Basra, where he remained until his death in Kuwait on December 24, 1964.

As for Jewad Selim, he was born in Turkey in 1920. He first studied in Baghdad then left for London and Paris where he studied art. After returning to Baghdad he taught at the Fine Arts Institute. In 1951 he founded the Baghdad Group for Modern Art which had great effect on the Iraqi arts movement. He died in Baghdad on December 21, 1961 after concluding his most important work, *The Monument of Liberty*.

To give an idea of Al-Sayyab's view of poetry, we may quote an introduction he gave to some poems which he recited at a literary evening in Beirut.

"If I am to draw a picture of the modern poet, I see his image closer to that I have in mind of Saint John who saw the seven sins beset the world as if they were a giant octopus. Most of the great poets have been for centuries a type of Saint John. For example, we may mention such notable poets as Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, T.S. Eliot and Edith Sitwell." Implicitly, he saw himself as one of them.

Al-Sayyab associated poetry with religion, seeing that "just as the divisions between the end and means in religion disappeared, so did such divisions in poetry. When we believe in religion, we do not seek an earthly benefit. Likewise, when we read poetry, we do not seek material benefit. But, we know that religion has a noble end and so does poetry."

He also held that the purpose of modern poetry is to "awaken the soul," and thus he made his attitude towards materialism clear.

As concerning Jewad Selim's view of art, he saw it as "a language whose words are colours, lines and shades. We should know something about it: what does the painter attempt at through this language?"

"This language uses the same means used in old times but in a new mould, shaped according to the effects of the modern age. In poetry, for example, it is no longer natural to compose poetry like that of the pre-Islamic period. Painting, in various ages, follows basic points, that is beauty of colours, lines and patterns as a whole to give a true expression of the painter's perspective of his age. A true painter should know what he draws and why he draws it."

Jewad Selim adopted Picasso's idea who saw that 'the aim of a painter is to deliver humanity from lapsing into evil and vice.'

What Selim meant at this stage of his career can be summed up in the outlines of the Manifesto of The Baghdad Group for Modern Art, announced following the holding of its first art exhibition in 1951. "We want to depict people's life in a new form, defined by our view of the life and development in Iraq, the

scene of many civilisations which flourished and then decayed."

The Group also said in their manifesto that they could not overlook their intellectual and stylistic associations with the artistic movement prevailing in the world. But at the same time, they sought to create forms that would give the Iraqi art its particular mark and identity.

Al-Sayyab on the other hand, wanted poetry to restore "the true meanings" which are connected with man whom he saw as his end in all his efforts. For instance, he asked, "Should we concentrate on the technique and ignore man? Or isn't man, that is the end in every struggle, more worthy of attention than anything else?"

He underlined his national tendency in a question which he put to himself and to others: "Does a writer have to be 'internationalist' before being nationalist or should he begin with his country and nation which can lead him on the road to humanity?"

In a letter to another Iraqi poet, Al-Sayyab clearly expressed his viewpoint towards this matter. "Have you read what T.S. Eliot wrote about the individual talent and about heritage and their association with poetry? We should keep some association between the old and the new. We should keep some of the old features in what we call new. Our poetry should not be a disfigured thing in Arab or semi-Arab guise. We should make utmost use of our poetic tradition and at the same time take advantage of what was accomplished by the Westerners, particularly those speaking English, in the realm of poetry."

When we explore the works of Al-Sayyab and Selim, we find them bringing about reconciliation between more than one trend in their works. In his poetic works, Al-Sayyab made good use of Arab poetic tradition and modern visions in the Western poetry. He saw the modern poem through the "free verse" which he viewed as a new structure and a new realistic trend intended to smash romantic laxity, the ivory-tower literature and the classical stagnation as well as to crush rhetorical poetry which is usually written by political and social poets. A mature revolution, in his view is "a review of the past and heritage and an attempt to get rid of its ill material and to bring out and develop the good material in it."

As for Jewad Selim, he set his works within the same context of artistic development beginning with the ancient civilisation of Mesopotamia, moving towards Al-Wasiti and ending with the present time civilisation with its rich and fertile trends. He summed up his viewpoint as follows: "Modern art is the art of the age, and the complexity in it reflects the complexity of the age. It represents anxiety, fear, immense disparity in most things, human massacres, the move away from God and the new view of things brought about by the new theories in psychology and other sciences. Quoting Henry Moore, Selim held that the

work of art should have its own vitality and it should not be a mere reflection of life's dynamism.

So, the modernist view of Al-Sayyab and Selim was based on "connection" and not on "separation" from the past or the present. This view stemmed from a genuine desire for deepening the foundations of reality. Each of them was inclined to adopt "dialectic" in his historical attitude and viewed life through a perspective based on dream and freedom. Their search for a "new form" was coupled with a search for "new content."

The symbols in Selim's paintings and sculptures and in many of Al-Sayyab poems were based on a focal idea which gave their works "suggestive power." This kept their works far from clarity and the directness which led art and poetry in the previous stages to some sort of superficiality and naivety. There were such symbols commonly used by Jewad Selim and Al-Sayyab as:

- * Women with their various characteristics and qualities.

- * Symbols derived from land and human reality.

- * Historical symbols related to the civilisation of the Mesopotamia.

- * Other symbols related to reality and life.

The great work of art which combined together all of Jewad Selim's symbols and embodied the idea which he lived up to is *The Monument of Liberty*. Of course, there are other works which we can find in them many of the symbols which represented Selim's ideas and inclinations to grasp the spirit of a complete civilisation.

Among them are works such as:

- * *Man and Land*: a bronze sculpture executed in 1953.

- * *Motherhood* sculpture.

- * *The Political Prisoner*, sculpture.

- * *The Sinbad's Eighth Voyage*, Painting.

- * *The Master Mason*

The world of the Arabian Nights provided Selim with many visions which he gave shape to in paintings expressing his indulgence in that world. The value of Selim's works has diverse aspects. Firstly, it is an absolute value indicating a sharp mind and fertile imagination. Secondly, it relates to the ancient Iraqi and Arab art. Thirdly, it is a value associated with the steady psychological search within a nation which suddenly awakened and endeavoured to assert and firmly establish itself in the world.

As concerns Al-Sayyab's poetic symbols, they can be divided into two kinds: The first includes historical symbols and myths derived from the civilisation of Mesopotamia such as Ishtar, Tammuz, the Wild Pig. This is in addition to other symbols derived from folk heritage such as Sinbad. The second kind includes symbols derived from the human life, such as: *The Blind Prostitute*, *Old Things for Sale*, *The Detective*, *The Brothel*, *Jaikour*²¹, *Buwaib* and human figures

which he restored from his own past.

Al-Sayyab brought up all the meanings of immortality, which the myths of Mesopotamia are pregnant with. He concentrated on the meanings of fertility, growth and resurrection in his poetry. In his poem *Christ After Crucifixion*, he gave many pictures associated with fertility and growth:

*When mulberry and orange send blossoms,
When Jaikour stretches away until imagination limits
When it grows green, with grass,
singing its fragrance and sun,
which fed it with beams,
When its night grows green,
My heart would glow with warmth
My blood would flow in its soil
My heart is a sun throbbing with light
My heart is the soil sprouting
Grain, flowers and water.*

He adds:

*I died, for bread to be eaten in my name,
to be planted with the season.
How many a life I live, for in every hole
I became a future, I became a seed,
A generation of people, my blood in every heart
Either a drop or a little of it.*

Christ after Crucifixion Collected Poem, p. 491

On another occasion, we find Al-Sayyab pining for home. He voiced such feeling in his poem *Stranger at the Gulf*, which he wrote in Kuwait in 1953 after he had fled Iraq.

*On the Sand, at the Gulf
A stranger sat, letting his eyes wander on the Gulf,
Breaking down pillars of light
with his sobbing roaring up
higher than waves and than noise
A sound resounds in my bereaved depths:
Shouting Iraq,
Just like tides, a cloud, or tears
rising to eyes
The wind's shouting at me: Iraq
The waves are roaring at me: Iraq, Iraq
only Iraq!
The sea is as wide as it can be
You are as far as you can be
The sea is between you and me: Iraq.
Longing's surging in my blood
As if all my blood were longing
I feel a hunger for my land
Like the hunger of the drowned for the air
like the longing of an embryo for a birth,
After peeping from darkness.*

He went on:

*Among awe-ridden villages and foreign cities
Are my steps. I sang your beloved soil
And carrying it, I am Christ dragging
His Cross in exile.*

Stranger at the Gulf
Collected Poems, p.321

Let us reflect upon these pictures, meanings and symbols on which Al-Sayyab built his poems and his visions, comparing them with those found in "The Monument of Liberty," Jewad Selim's noted work. Let us take the "child" in which "the sculptor saw hope and future", according to Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, and read Al-Sayyab's *Homage to Gailan* having in mind what Selim's "child" represents:

*O, Heaven, I declared my resurrection
So my immortality in life is well-kept by blood.*

Homage to Gailan.
Collected Poems, p.325

Let us take Selim's "weeping woman" which represents "indignation and bereavement." Isn't it like the image of "the mother" who in the poem *Jaikour and Town* mourns her son who had come to town to light it up but he was struck by electricity and so he was defeated.

The "martyr" in the Monument has an image closer to that given by Al-Sayyab in *Christ After Crucifixion*.

When we see the image of "the soldier" whose body emanates from the people's entity like explosion, we recall many of the poetic pictures given by Al-Sayyab about sacrifice and victory, particularly in his poem, *The River and Death*.

As concerns the image of "the woman carrying torch," which is an expression of "freedom", in the Monument it reminds us of more than one image in more than one poem by Al-Sayyab specifically his poem *Jamila Buhaird*.

Aren't the Tigris and Euphrates, the equivalent of the symbols of fertility and growth in Al-Sayyab's poetry?

Both Jewad Selim and Al-Sayyab were filled with true love for their land. Selim believed that there cannot be art without land nurturing it with its culture and history. He underlined his psychological attachment to the Iraqi creativity. So was the case with Al-Sayyab who found in this land all the symbols, which he used in his poetry.

As for the point of disagreement between Jewad Selim and Al-Sayyab, it lies in their view of town.

Jewad Selim was a city dweller or an urban man. While Al-Sayyab was a countryman. This may ex-

plain why their view of town was different. Selim viewed town as his "world" with its various aspects. So, he aspired to create an art parallel to his idea of 'civilised life', seeking a new style and a new way in art. He associated this with a "comprehensive humanitarian view."

Meanwhile, Al-Sayyab saw town as the antithesis of the environment he wanted. So, "formalities" were no concern of him. He also did not concern himself with the consolidation of civilisation. Even "style" was not so much a concern to him as a means for his concerns.

He voiced utmost denunciation of city life in his poem *Jaikour and Town*:

*The city roads surround me
Like ropes of mud chewing my heart
Like ropes of fire slashing naked, and fields
Burning Jaikour at the bottom of my heart
And sowing ashes of hatred in it.
Who is to kindle love in all roads,
in every cafe and in every house?
Who is to turn again man's clutches
into a hand with which a child wipes his forehead?
and when it touches veins of stone, they get
moistened from the divine heart in it?*

Then, he gave town the image of monster, while describing his state in it:

*My hand is no clutch for conflict
to use it in the roads of city
Nor is it a fist to breathe life into clay
But it is a pure clay
Jaikour is circled by fence with a gate
and wrapped up in security.*

Jaikour and Town,
Collected Poems, p. 414

He saw the return to Jaikour as his utmost dream and the end of the road which he sought to save himself from the city blockade. He saw such blockade as something seeking to strip him of human nature after it had killed all humanitarian meanings in its life.

So far, we have gone through "meaning" but we have not touched upon "structure" in the works of Jewad Selim and Al-Sayyab. From inside this structure of the works of each, an important matter comes up, a matter which promotes the idea of "common ground." It is the idea of "contextuality," which occupied the mind of Al-Sayyab since he wrote his first poetry collection *The Song of Rain*. In this respect, the "poetic work" is viewed within the context of the poet's experience which takes certain form with the development of the idea and structure within a single poetic work.

Jewad Selim gave shape to the same idea in his great work *The Monument of Liberty*, making utmost



Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab, 1925-1964.

use of long years of experience and an accumulation of visions and symbols which had not taken a clear-cut shape in his mind before. He arranged them into a verse read from right to left. Every group suggests an idea independent from the other but each of them relates to the other within a context indicating the

meaning suggested by the Monument as a whole. It is Iraq's longing for freedom since ancient times and the sacrifices made for it and eventually for the achievement of prosperity and promotion of creativity.

Translated by: Adnan Salman

Footnotes

(1) Reference is made here to the foreign artists and educated figures who came to Baghdad during the Second World War.

(2) Jaikour is a village in Basra where Al-Sayyab was born.



Drawing, Jewad Selim, 1953

Objectivism and Abstraction in Iraqi Music

Munthir Jameel Hafidh

Iraqi music can be traced back to the early civilisations of Mesopotamia. It represents hereditary traditions and customs dating back to the second millennium B.C.

Musical activities of that period had their own features. The various instruments used at that time continued to develop throughout history at the hands of the consecutive groups that lived in the area like the Sumerians, Akkadians, Babylonians and Assyrians

Music accompanied singing, the singer adopted rhythmic poetry to ascertain his presence within the ensemble, which included the harp, the lyre, the lute, the pipe, the sistrum and various other instruments. There is a clear link between these ancient instruments and present day Iraqi instruments.

Clay tablets discovered in Iraq show that ancient Iraqi music was based on modes and scales known by their symbols in cuneiform writing. The ancient Greeks borrowed these symbols which became well-established during the Hellenistic period. Later on during the early years of Christianity they became fixed terms.

Ever since their evolution, musical rules integrated with folk music. The then prevailing values and concepts of the peoples coexisting in the region between the Euphrates and the Mediterranean sea intermingled throughout history and left their marks on the development of music.

Music therefore became a combination of the Indian Raga mode and its microtones called "Shruti" and other old modes known by the names of their original places such as Dorian and Phrygian. The ancient peoples of this region used these modes and scales in preaching.

The Pentatonic mode, which is originally oriental, was introduced in various parts of Europe by the missionaries who brought back with them the traditional music of those peoples.

Eastern musical instruments also became known in various parts of the world and probably the conquests of Alexander the Great, missionaries, Islamic conquests and finally the Crusades all contributed to the spread of these instruments.

Music in Mesopotamia was performed on various

scales and instruments. Priests sang in a way that suited the type of music played then during religious rituals or war and royal ceremonies.

Archaeological findings revealed the names and types of many of these musical modes. Hence it has become possible to study their scales and sound dimensions, recreate the structures of the instruments, and to put them in tune.

Musical rituals in Mesopotamia were divided into two parts. The first is related to the traditional priesthood type of singing known as "Gala" (meaning solemn singing in the Sumerian language). The second is related to public celebrations and other occasions and is known as "Nar" (meaning joyful singing in the Sumerian language). Traditional singing was strict while instrumental music was smooth, joyful and ceremonial.

Priests dealt with singing sensually. In other words each occasion had its own musical scale and special songs. These musical traditions having been handed down from one generation to another throughout centuries in the east of the Euphrates region had set the characteristics of eastern music which are still valid at present. On the other hand groups of people living west of the Euphrates were affected by the Roman and Greek civilisations. This included their music which was also different from the type prevailing in the east of the Euphrates. One of the instruments they used was the hydraulic organ made by Ktesibios in Alexandria in the third century. A graphic description of the organ given by Al-Farabi was included in a book entitled *Keshif al-Humoom wel Karab fi Sherih Alat al-Tareb* written in the fourteenth century by an anonymous author.

Arabs and other Eastern communities did not appreciate the sound of the organs or bells. They were rather familiar with their own inherited music and instruments. Therefore, when Islam rose singing was performed according to old musical recitals.

Objectivism in musical art is simply the tradition that has been passed from one generation to another verbally. The tunes were put to suit the words and the musical sentences would be repeated so as to achieve mode variations. The tune is often accompa-

nied by descriptive poetry and since it has become a custom the whole style has become known as "tradition" Such a style covers religious and non-religious music and singing and is mainly noticed in the local traditional Iraqi *Maqam*. The Iraqi *Maqam* is based on certain modes which developed into a distinguished way of singing. The rhythm of the *Maqam* is steady and heavy and suitable for singing at religious occasions.

The musical instrument is the means through which the singer can say what he wants literally in a balanced style. This practice includes almost all traditional and folk music and songs of the East. This type of songs is described as spontaneous and its music monotonous. That is attributed to the repetition of the motif which forms a melodic pattern and moves along according to a traditional modulation.

The motif which is the essence of the melody takes an elastic form in tempo. Consecutive and long melodies which are of slow tempo are almost combined in one lyrical sentence based on a tonality which can be modulated, developed and expanded to give the characteristic inherited in vocal tune.

Tonality became the main character of eastern singing. The singer or musician is no longer interested in shifting or changing the melodic motif.

The idea of abstracting the melody from its objective character is somehow peculiar as far as eastern music is concerned as its tonal components do not depend on the melody in creating its essence and vitality. The rhythm of the word is the factor that decides the type of mode to be used in the end tune of the song. Abstraction requires breaking up or adapting the motif by changing its tonal and rhythmic elements and this is incompatible with eastern music.

The idea of abstract motif has wider application in Arabic calligraphy where the letter loses its shape when mixed with another letter in a decorative geometric pattern. Letters and words have general abstract features even though they are written in a simple manner as in the Kufic style.

Composing music has a long way to go before gaining such a decorative skill. That is attributed to the years of stagnation that prevailed in the Islamic East in the past.

There are certain musical means which use abstraction as a means of prolonging the monotonous musical sentence. Among these means are instrumental improvisation and vocal improvisation. In the latter the singer would take a word such as *Ya Layl*, as a motif for repetition, change and variation. Certain tune decorations would be added every now and then to form what is known as Arabesque.

Iraqi music is in the middle of the road between objectivism and abstraction. Its objectivism is derived from the fact that it is closely linked with heritage as an artistic tradition. It is also affected by the Arabic language as it has a rhythmic poetic sound and as a means of expression inherited from the past generations. Deviation from musical tradition is a means to achieve abstraction in tune rhythm. It is also a means of development. This requires full understanding of the components of the Eastern mode for any change in its modul structure means a change in its main features, as it is considered the heir to Mesopotamian music.

Translated by Ranin Khalid Saeed



A Harp Player from Babylon.

Al-Mirbad Poetry Festival



Minister of Information and Culture addressing the 7th Al-Mirbad Poetry Festival

"Singing for Our Past, Writing for the Future" was the theme under which the 7th Al-Mirbad Poetry Festival was held in Baghdad from November 22 to December 1, 1986. Over 500 poets, 200 critics and scholars from Iraq, the Arab world and other countries took part in the Festival which was opened by President Saddam Hussein's representative, Mr Latif Nssayif Jassim, Minister of Information and Culture.

Addressing the participants, the Minister pointed out that President Hussein had ordered all possible facilities and services to be rendered to ensure the success of the Festival. He added that the presence of such a large number of foreign and Arab prominent figures was an indication of their solidarity with and support for Iraq in its fight against the designs of the backward regime of Iran. Mr Jassim referred to the setbacks taking place in the Arab

world and the collaboration of some Arab heads of state with the Iranian regime saying, "Iraq believes that those rulers do not represent the Arab Nation." "In repulsing the Iranian aggression we do not only count on people and weapons but also on the high morale of the Arabs. Your participation in this Festival is a practical expression of such morale and of the Nation's potential to overcome any obstacles."

The Minister then announced that decision had been taken that a special broadcasting studio, a TV channel and a special daily bulletin, *Al-Mirbad* would provide daily coverage of Festival's activities.

Following the speech of the Minister the students of Al-Rashid Primary School performed two tableaux vivants which were admired by the guests.

Later the first poetry reciting session was held. The first poet was Kamal al-Hadithi (Iraq) who

recited a long metrical poem in which he criticised Arab heads of state for not offering their utmost support for Iraq and for not sharing the responsibility of defending the Arab homeland against the Iranian aggression.

This poet amazed the audience for learning by heart such a long and expressive poem despite the fact that he is blind.

The second poet was Mohammed al-Tuhami (Egypt) who in his metrical poem praised Iraq and expressed support for the Iraqis in the war imposed by the Iranian aggressors.

Next was Dr Su'ad al-Sabah (Kuwait), who enchanted the audience with a free verse expressing her admiration of the courage of the Iraqi fighters and her reproof of some of the Arabs' disappointing attitude towards the Iraq-Iran war. The following poet was Abdul Hamid Bakkoush, ex-Premier of Libya, whose metrical poem also expressed support for the Iraqi people and armed forces. Abdulla Ahmed Hussein (Kuwait) read out a metrical poem which was appreciated by the audience.

Though all poems were appreciated it was Ahmed Suleiman al-Ahmed (Syria) who not only won the admiration but also received a standing ovation for the powerful and highly expressive poem he recited. Al-Ahmed's metrical poem was exceptionally eloquent in attacking the Arabs who are collaborating with the Iranian regime. The last poet was Abdul Razzaq Abdul Wahid (Iraq) whose free verse was not up to his usual poetic standard.

After the session the participants visited the Monument to the Unknown Soldier where wreaths were laid.

The poetry reading sessions were held twice a day throughout the Festival. Most of the 500 Iraqi, Arab and foreign poets, recited their poetry. However the shortcoming was that not all the poems of the foreign representatives were translated into Arabic, so not all of them could recite their poems. This of course was not the fault of the Festival, simply because the foreign poets should have had their poems translated beforehand so as to have them ready for the Festival. Yet, many of such poems have been translated during the Festival, mostly by Dr Salman al-Wasiti (Iraq), who is an expert in poetry translation. The foreign poets who read out their poetry during the festival included, Henry Beissel (Canada) who recited twice, Omar Ezra Pound (USA), Max Schwartz (USA) also read out twice, Anne Fairbairn (Australia), Denis Lee (Canada), Kamal Bayran (Turkey), Gary Holthaus and Constantine Sikforsev (USSR). The Arab poets, from all Arab countries, have all had the chance to read out their poetry.

The poetry reading sessions were all held at Al-Rashid Theatre in Baghdad, except for three sessions, one held in Mosul (North Iraq) and the

other in Basra (South Iraq) and the final one was held at the Martyr's monument in Baghdad to mark Martyrs Day, December 1, also the last day of the Festival. The majority of the poems expressed love for Baghdad, the city of peace, and the poets' appreciation of the bravery of the Iraqi armed forces in frustrating the Iranian aggression against Iraq. Many of the poems denounced the treacherous stance of some Arab regimes, which are collaborating with the aggressive Iranian regime against Iraq. The Arab poets announced their rejection of providing the Iranian regime with weapons and financing its war effort. The foreign poets, particularly those from the USA, strongly attacked Reagan and his policy. Gary Holthaus (USA) for instance, described Reagan saying "He is a bully and bullies are weak." Max Schwartz (also USA) pointed out "Reagan is harming the image of presidency ... The US policy raises money on the account of the welfare of other countries ... Accordingly, the people of America are suffering from isolation and are regarded by many of the world peoples as heartless and evil."

As far as the criticism sessions are concerned, also two sessions were held each day. This obviously was another shortcoming because such an arrangement to hold the poetry reading and the criticism sessions at exactly the same time daily have forced the participants and the public to choose which to attend at a time.

There were eight criticism sessions, each of which included research papers ranging between four and seven. The speakers at these sessions were all Arab scholars, except for two foreigners, Dr Ann Munton and Denis Lee, both Canadians. At these sessions bi-lingual interpretation was provided by the staff of Dar al-Ma'mun for Translation and Publishing. Therefore all participants could contribute and understand. Interpretation was not available at the poetry reading sessions, simply because it is very difficult to translate poetry on the spot.

In criticism sessions every speaker had to read out the summary of his paper in 15 minutes, which made some speakers read their research papers hastily because they had not summarized their papers beforehand. When all speakers had their turn, the participants had the right to question and criticise the papers of the session, each in two minutes. Later the speakers concerned had to answer the questions and try to defend their points of view. Usually, every session lasted for about two hours.

The research papers read out during the sessions were rich and highly academic. They included "The Problems of Critical Terminology" by Dr Salah Fadhl, "Some of the problems in communicating poetry through Modern Mass Media," by Hatim al-Saqr, (Iraq) "War Poetry" by Mohammed al-Ghazzi (Tunisia), "The Arabic Language and



Representatives of the participants at the Festival laying wreaths at the Monument to Unknown Soldier in Baghdad





A visit to the front was organised for the participants where many poems were improvised

Poetry" by Sa'id al-Suraihi (Saudi Arabia), "Poetry and the Art of Novel Writing" by Jabra Ibrahim Jabra (Iraq), "Scheherazade in Canadian Prairies" by Dr Ann Munton (Canada) and many others.

One of the most controversial papers was "Translation of Poetry — the Ideal and the Creative Translators" by Dr Mohammed Abdul Hay (Sudan).

In his paper Dr Abdul Hay pointed out that translators should take into account the intellectual meaning, which is spiritual and strongly linked to the Arab Nation's history and culture, and the literal meaning, which if translated would be a mere borrowing that would mean nothing to the foreign readers. He gave examples of such borrowings, such as the "evergreen cypress," which in the West is mostly found in graveyards, thus suggests death and sadness, "To the Arabs it would be just a tree of no particular symbolism, thus such a borrowing would be meaningless."

The speaker claimed that Nazik al-Mala'ika, the famous Iraqi poetess and a pioneer of modernism in Arabic poetry, is a perfect example of the ideal translator. He said that she translated the poetry of John Keats and claimed it was her own poetry. He said that her poem *The Song of the Moon* from her

collection *The Moon Tree* is an ideal translation of one of Keats' famous poems. He said that Al-Mala'ika is not only highly influenced by Keats' poetry and images but actually provided ideal translations of his poems into Arabic. He accused Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, the famous poet, art critic, artist and writer of similar acts.

This paper infuriated most of the participants and led to heated discussions.

The criticism sessions were concluded by announcing that only bi-lingual poets, well acquainted with the culture, history, religion and tradition of both sides of the poetic origins should translate poetry. This is meant to provide for the readers reliable translations.

The Festival was concluded with the announcement that as from next year the Saddam Prize for Literature, which amounts to 30,000 US dollars each will be annually awarded to three Arab winners at Al-Mirbad Poetry Festival.

The prize is to be awarded to the Arab innovators in poetry, fiction, contemporary literary research papers, history of literature and linguistic studies.

The Committee of the Saddam Prize for Literature will be formed in Baghdad and chaired by the



More than 500 poets, 200 critics and a large audience attended the Festival

Iraqi Minister of Information and Culture. It will include a Secretariat General, also based in Baghdad and directly connected with the Chairman. The members of the Secretariat General and the Secretary General will be in charge of receiving, classifying, checking and following up the nominations prior to submitting them to the jury. The Committee will select 15 members to form the jury, who will equally represent poets, fiction writers, researchers and scholars.

In addition to the criticism sessions held at Al-Mansour Melia Hotel and the poetry reading sessions at Al-Rashid Theatre, other activities were also organised during the Festival.

Tours were organised for the participants to Kerbala, Najaf, Basra, Mosul, Babylon and Samarra, where they had a chance to visit historical sites and the holy shrines.

The Cultural Affairs Department has put its 500 publications on display in a book fair opened by the Minister of Information and Culture, Mr Latif Nssayif Jassim on November 23. The 500 books in various fields of knowledge are the publications of the Department in 1986, "The Year of Culture."

Moreover, 58 books published in implementation of the joint Arab publishing project, were also put

on show. This project was concluded between Iraq and some Arab publishing houses to secure better circulation of Arabic literary books throughout the Arab world.

Another activity was a painting exhibition held by the young Iraqi artist Ghada al-Habib. This one-person exhibition of Al-Habib, attracted the participants of Al-Mirbad who enjoyed viewing the paintings whenever they had free time.

A photography exhibition was also held at Al-Mansour Melia Hotel to mark the Festival. The photographs put on show were selected out of this year's Festival as well as a collection from previous Festivals.

Another book exhibition was also held at the Palestine-Meridien Hotel, organised by the National House for Publications, Distribution and Advertising.

Finally, on the eve of the opening session of the Festival the participants were taken to the front where they met the brave Iraqi fighters. Some of the poets were so moved that they read out or improvised poems on the spot, meaning to express support for Iraq in its fight against the Iranian aggressors.

Arab Dramatists Union



Minister of Information and Culture attending the conference

Arab dramatists met in Baghdad January 5-7, 1987 and approved the establishment of the Union of Arab Dramatists with Baghdad as its headquarters. They also approved after lengthy discussions the statute of the Union and elected an executive committee with Sami Abdul Hamid (Iraq) Chairman Faud Shatti (Kuwait), Muhammad Wafiq (Egypt), Hatim al-Sayed (Jordan) and Muhammad Harrarah (Palestine) as members. Al-Munsif Al-Sowaisi (Tunisia) was elected Secretary General of the Union.

Speaking on the occasion Muhsin Al-Azzawi chairman of the preparatory committee of the 3-day conference said the idea of establishing an Arab dramatists union was first discussed in 1973. But, for some reasons it did not materialize until in 1980 when the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (ALICSO) approved the idea and recommended that a conference be held for this purpose.

A delegation of the Iraqi Artists Union met with the Iraqi Minister of Information and Culture who gave the green light for the implementation of the project.

A committee was formed for this purpose and

invitations were extended to Arab dramatists to attend the first conference.

Addressing the conference on its opening session the Minister of Information and Culture described the gathering of Arab dramatists as a long desired need for a concerted action that would help develop and improve the artistic movement in the Arab world.

Arab dramatists, at the end of the 3-day meeting agreed to promote relations among themselves, organize their efforts in ensuring the freedom of expression to all Arab artists; preserving and protecting Arab heritage and traditions and to work for the improvement of their living technical and artistic standards.

They also agreed that the aforementioned objectives could be achieved through; encouraging documentation, research, criticism, play writing and translation organising theatre festivals meetings and meanwhile taking part in similar international activities and exchanging expertise.

Meanwhile they decided to introduce a theatrical work with artists representing all Arab countries taking part in it. This work will be performed during the Carthage festival in Tunisia later this year.

A Busy Season for Dramatists and Film-makers

The theatrical winter season in Iraq has been busy. Most of the works have been on stage for more than two months. The Modern Art Theatre Company's *The Silk Thread* by Yousif Al-Ani was first staged last November and continued for more than two months. It criticizes some obsolete social traditions obstructing social progress in Iraq. The play's plot takes place during the 1930s and 1940s, the favourite period of Al-Ani. It was directed by Dr. Fadhil Khalil.

The Station, presented by the National Theatre Company and directed by Fathi Zein Al-Abidin depicts daily life activities at a rural community and their behaviour and conduct during hard times. This successful play has been on show for over three months running. It has been received with nationwide acclaim.

That is Life, a comedy written and directed by Muqdad Muslim is another production of the National Theatre Company. The play is based on some Baghdadi proverbs and popular traditional Arab stories.

The 14th July Theatre Company's play *Batran's Inn* by Faruq Mohammad and directed by Muhsin Al-Ali, has been on for over three months. Like many recent Iraqi plays, it is set in the 1930s. It depicts the themes of reliance, passivity and indifference.

In a joint venture, the Popular Theatre Company and Today Theatre Company performed *The Yelling of the Dumb Silence*, written by Muhyiddin Zangana and directed by Dr. Awni Karroumi. It shows how today's man is being dwarfed by the overwhelming technological progress.

During the Art Day Festival, *The Return*, a play by Yousif Al-Sayigh, a distinguished contemporary poet and playwright was restaged. The play touches upon a critical situation at war time. It tells the story of a soldier played by Muhammad Abdul Abbas, who deserts his post at war time and seeks refuge at home among his kith and kin. To his amazement, he realizes that even his wife, played by Hadeel Kamel, does not approve his shameful act. She tries her best to make her husband rejoin his unit.



Building No. 13, A Feature Film dealing with conflict between people in a changing society.

Al-Basra Theatre Company started its 1987 winter season with its new play *The Matchmaker*. It is a comedy, written by Abdul Jabbar Al-Timmimi and directed by Nasir Odah.

Iraqi film-makers made two comedy movies in 1986, *Love in Baghdad*, screenplay by Salim Al-Basri, directed by Abdul Hadi Al-Rawi and produced by the Cinema and Theatre Authority. The second, under montage, is *Building No.13*, written by Abdul Bari al-Uboodi, directed by Subhi Haddad and produced by Babil Company for TV and Cinema Production.

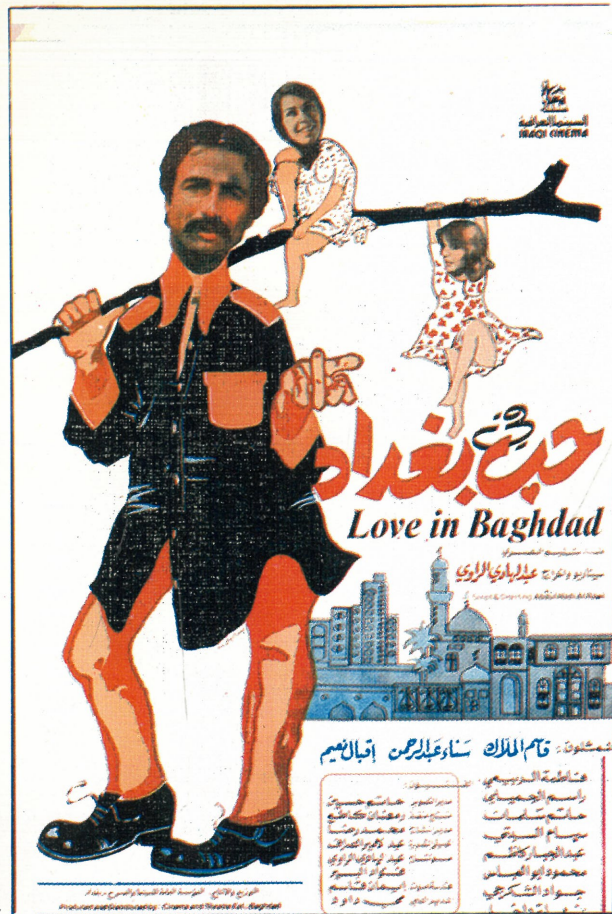
Al-Basri's *Love in Baghdad* is set in Baghdad in the 1960s with the hero Qassim (Qassim al-Mallak) as a carpenter who, after a car accident, suffers from amnesia. When Wassim's memory comes back to him ten years later, he sees tremendous changes have taken place in Baghdad.

Building No.13 is a satire movie about naive people who fall victims to crooks. The film depicts the conflict between the two types of people in a changing society. Director Sahib Haddad defends his work saying "I am trying to introduce the new generation to the audience. When acting they do a lot of talking. Instead I largely depended on movement — in a comic way."

The Cavalier and the Mountain is a feature film being shot and produced by the Cinema and Theatre Authority. It is written by Abdul Khaliq Al-Rikabi and directed by Mohammed Shukri Jamil.

Another production of the Cinema and Theatre Authority is *Challenging Men* a documentary film about life in a military youth camp, written and directed by Mohammad Al-Ta'ie. It shows Iraq's preparedness to confront Iranian aggression.

The Last Encounter is a documentary on the life and works of the late Iraqi sculptor Khalid al-Rahhal.



Love in Baghdad depicts social changes in a satirical way.



That is Life, deals with Baghdadi proverbs and popular traditional Arab stories.

Art Day



At the front, a photograph by Fuad Shakir from the photography exhibition

Iraqi artists marked the Art Day (January 8-11, 1987) with nationwide activities and exhibitions in which many Iraqi, Arab and foreign artists and prominent figures took part.

During the inaugural ceremony, Minister of Information and Culture, Mr. Latif Nsayyif Jassim honoured a number of pioneer and distinguished Iraqi artists. They were awarded certificates of merit in appreciation of their role and efforts in promoting arts movement in Iraq in the fields of cinema, theatre, music and visual arts.

In his opening speech, the Minister praised the works of art presented over the past seven years of the Iraq-Iran war.

During the first day of the festival the Minister opened an arts exhibition at Saddam Centre for Arts in Baghdad. It included 245 works of painting and graphics, 49 sculptures and 37 items of ceramic. In



A painting by Ala' Bashir from an exhibition held during Art Day celebrations.

this exhibition, which was organised by the Iraqi Artists Society, artists from all Iraqi provinces took part. War was the major theme of most of the works on display. They depicted battles fought by the Iraqi army; acts of heroism and bravery, life, and nature.

On the second day of the festival, a symposium on cinema and war was held at the Cinema and Theatre Authority. Discussions centred primarily on Iraqi cinema with a special focus on film production during the seven-year old Iraq-Iran war.

Two one-man photo exhibitions by Iraqi professional photographers Hazim Pack and Fu'ad Shaker were held at the National Gallery of Modern Art in Baghdad. In his collection of 65 photographs, Pack displayed his profound interest in Iraqi folklore and the traditional way of living in the old days. Fu'ad Shaker's collection included 35 photographs showing scenes from the battle fronts; landscapes and daily life

activities.

On the same occasion, an exhibition of the works of young ceramists was held at Al-Rashid Hotel. It contained 100 pieces of ceramic works made by eight young artists from the Academy of Fine Arts and the Institute of Fine Arts in Baghdad.

Many activities took place in the provinces also to mark this occasion. They included theatrical performances, exhibitions, poster and photographs display and song festivals.

The Minister of Information and Culture, Mr. Latif Nsayyif Jassim, opened on January 10, at the Orfali Gallery an exhibition of ceramics and gypsum reproductions of ancient statues dug out from archaeological sites recently. The exhibition lasted for two months.

Furthermore, the Artist's Union organised an exhibition of the private possessions and personal items

of the late veteran Haqqi Al-Shibli (1913-1985). Items on display which were carefully arranged into various sections, shed some light on Al-Shibli's life-long experience in theatre in Iraq. Some of the exhibits included his books, a collection of his manuscripts of various lectures he used to give since 1941 and the awards and medals Al-Shibli received on various occasions such as the Carthage Award in 1983.

On the concluding day of the festival, the third exhibition of Abdul Qadir Othman Al-Obaidi, an Iraqi painter, was opened at the National Theatre in Baghdad.

Al-Obaidi, 57, had 32 paintings on display. His painting style and attitude testify the artist's love for nature.

Meanwhile, there was a special show of the Iraqi film *Love in Baghdad* the latest production of the Cinema and Theatre Authority.



The Trios, a photograph by Hazim Pack from the photography exhibition

Art Exhibitions

The Arts Department at the Ministry of Information and Culture held an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Arts on October 6, last year under the theme "The Arabs in Sicily." The works on display were done by Italian artists. Another exhibition by the Department was held a week later under the theme "Arab Art in Spain" It was a display of works of some Spanish artists.

Burhan Jubur organised his one-man exhibition in the same month at Al-Rashid Gallery. On display were thirty oil paintings and sketches which depict his main theme—woman.

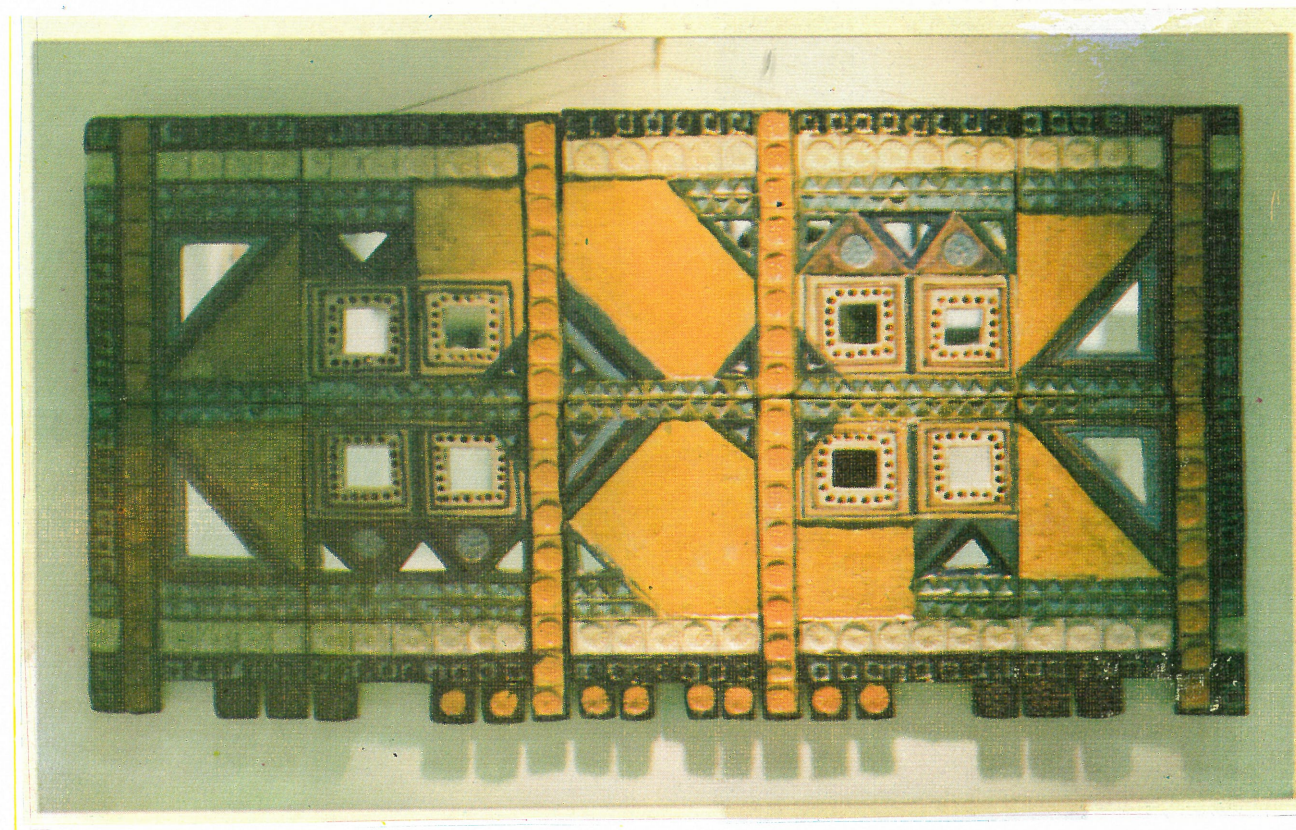
Mr Latif Nsayyif Jassim, Minister of Information and Culture opened on October 22, an exhibition organised to celebrate the third anniversary of the Orfali Gallery. During the 40-day long exhibition which was held under the theme "Modern Iraqi Paintings" 50 paintings and sketches were on display by famous Iraqi artists including Fa'iq Hassan, Rafa al-Nasiri, the late Khalid al-Rahhal and Mohammad Muhr al-Din. Most of the works were notable for their intensity of colour and their bayonet character

and were a genuine tribute to Modernism in Iraqi Art.

On November 29, the Minister also opened Nuha al-Radhi's ceramics exhibition at the Baghdad Gallery. On display were 104 pieces of ceramics depicting Iraqi heritage.

On December 1, the second annual exhibition of the Calligraphers' Society was opened. Sixteen artists took part with more than 40 works on display. The works featured Islamic ornamentation and various calligraphic styles.

Under the theme "Woman and Art" an exhibition exclusively by woman artists was opened at the Orfali Gallery on December 6, 1986. The 156 works by 40 women artists on display demonstrated the genuine contribution of Iraqi women artists to the art movement in Iraq. The fine collection on show included paintings, graphics, ceramics and silk-screen. It was such a magnificent artistic show where the old and young generations of artists meet together in one exhibition.



Nuha Al-Radhi, Ceramic.

A week later, the Minister of Information and Culture inaugurated the eighth one-man exhibition of Iraqi artist Abdul Sahib al-Rikabi. The two-week long exhibition held at Al-Riwaq Gallery included 22 oil paintings. The paintings portray the values of martyrdom throughout our history. This is al-Rikabi's fourth exhibition which focuses on the theme of war.

In mid-December Suhad Thenun Taha held her first one-person exhibition for flower making in Japanese Luna style. Flowers on display are made of special soft dough. After moulding it by hand, flowers are shaped and left to dry and then painted with oil colours.

By the end of 1986, three ceramics exhibitions were held. The first was organised by 30 young artists from the Ministry of Youth. The second exhibition was a joint show held by three woman artists at the Baghdad Hotel and the third was held at Al-Rashid Hotel by Nejiba Sabir. Most of the 150 works on display were done by Nejiba's students at the Baghdad Zuhoor School where she teaches how to work with cold ceramic, flower making and plant making inside large glass bottles.

The well-known Iraqi artist, Shakir Hassan al-Sa'id the prize winner at the Baghdad International Art Festival (November 1986) has published his 50

sketches shown in Baghdad Gallery 1985. Detailed description on the sketches is given including the type of material used and the dimensions of the sketches.

Muwaffaq Al-Khatib's one-man exhibition was the last event of the 1986 art season. In his 40 paintings on display, Al-Khatib, an impressionist, depicts scenes from Baghdadi life; old traditional markets, mosques, houses, costumes and women.

Visitors to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Headquarters in Paris pass now through the "Peace Gate" erected at the main entrance leading to the conference hall.

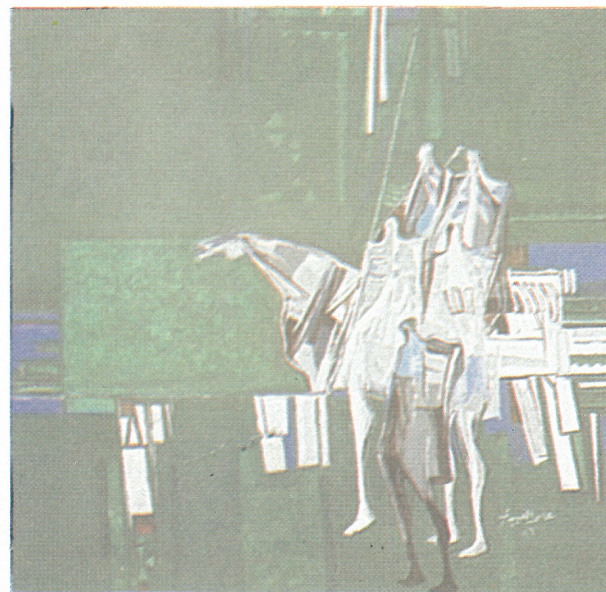
The Peace Gate is a wooden door made by the well-known Iraqi artist Muhammad Ghani Hikmat and presented by the Iraqi government to UNESCO. The Kufic and Arabic inscription on top of the gate reads "Peace Gate — a gift from the Republic of Iraq to UNESCO — 1986."

The 2.60 x 2.20m gate took Hikmat two weeks to finish working nine hours per day at the carpentry section at the basement of UNESCO's main building.

The mahogany gate was meant to be a symbol of peace nurtured and advocated by the Iraqi government. This is illustrated by the flying pigeons carved beneath the dedication words.



The Peace Gate, Iraq presented to UNESCO.



Amir Al-Obeidi, Oil, from an art exhibition held in Baghdad.



Iraqi costumes displayed at two fashion shows in Baghdad and Amman.

In December Tasmeem design centre organised a fashion show in which many new designs were presented. Most of the ideas used in these designs were taken from Arab and Islamic costumes both old and new. The show attracted a large number of audience and people interested in fashions and

designs.

In the following month, January 1987 the show moved to Amman, Jordan where the designs were displayed by Iraqi and Jordanian models. The show was received with great acclaim.

Musical Events

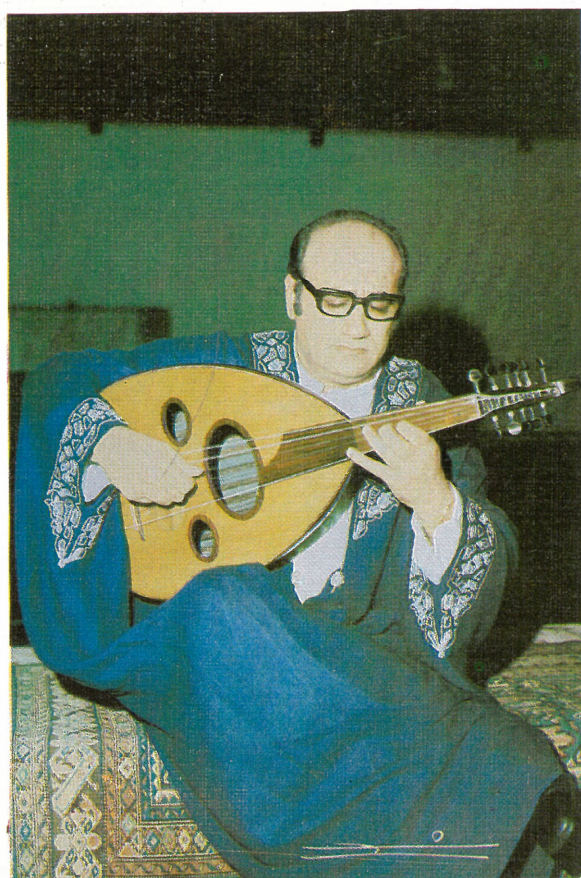
The Iraqi National Symphony Orchestra gave a concert on October 21-22, 1986, during which Mozart's symphony No.40 and Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker Suit were played. On November 18-19, 1986, the Orchestra played Tchaikovsky's famous piano concerto with Margeta Aliyeff on the piano, and Bezet's symphony in Do-Major.

On December 9-10, 1986, the Orchestra, played the overture of Marriage of Figaro by Mozart and Liszt's symphonic poem La Prelude.

Laith Abdul Ghani, an oboe soloist, made his debut during this concert and was received warmly. Laith is already a member of the Orchestra. He graduated at the Music and Ballet School in Baghdad. He then went to Moscow to further his studies. Back home in 1985 with a Master's degree in Music he joined the National Symphony Orchestra.

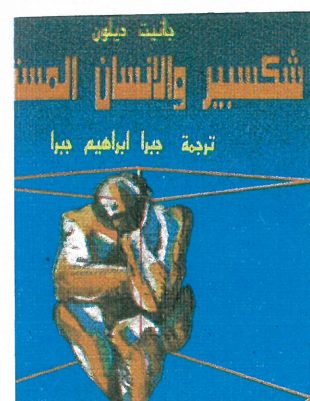
The last concert given in 1986 was on 22/23 December. The orchestra played a free form musical composition for the orchestra by the Iraqi composer Khalil Isma'il. Hungarian rapsody No.2 by Liszt and four Waltz pieces by Johann Strauss. On the same occasion the Iraqi oud virtuoso Munir Bashir was awarded the International Franz Liszt medal in appreciation for his performance and role as a leading musician of world fame. The medal was awarded by the Hungarian Ambassador to Iraq.

Sumer Chamber Ensemble gave several concerts at various cultural centres in Baghdad. The ensemble was founded in 1967 with 6 musicians who were among the founding members of the National Symphony Orchestra. After long absence, the ensemble resumed its activities in November 1985.



Iraqi Oud Virtuoso Munir Bashir was awarded the International Franz Liszt medal.

New Books and Publications



Dar al-Ma'mun for Translation and Publishing has issued eighteen books over the last four months. They were mainly political and translated texts of President Saddam Hussein's speeches. They were published in English, French, Spanish, Turkish, German and Persian.

Four literary books were translated into Arabic and published by Dar al-Ma'mun during the same period; Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dallaway*, translated by Ata Abdul Wahab, *Djinn* by A.R. Grillet translated by Sa'id Alwesh and Khedega Benani, Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Hamlet* translated by Jabra I. Jabra.

The Cultural Affairs Department, another major Iraqi publishing house plans to publish 100 books this year covering various scientific and literary topics. Among its latest books published by late 1986, is *Al-Meskunoon* (The Possessed), a novel by Abdul Razzaq al-Muttelibi. It is a story of a group of people who went looking for a treasure thought to be buried somewhere.

A poetry collection by Sami Mahdi, an Iraqi poet, has also been published by the Department. This fine collection includes poems written by Mahdi between 1965-1985.

The most recent book written on President Saddam Hussein's life is *Saddam Hussein: A Leader and a History* by Sabah Selman. The author, a journalist and the director general of the National Records Centre, has previously written a book on the President entitled *Saddam Hussein: Man and Leader*.

The Nature of Sleeping and Dreaming in the Light of the Science of the Brain by Dr. Noori Ja'far is the latest issue of the weekly *Little Encyclopaedia* series. In his book, the author gives a description of sleeping as a phenomenon and how and why it happens. With

more elaboration, he traces back historical background information on how early Arab scientists explained this human phenomenon.

All in all, 215 books were out for sale between November and December 1986; 33 science books; 32 novels; 27 books on religion; 26 poetry collections; 31 books on music, art, cinema, drama and literary criticism; 32 books on politics, military, economics and law and 21 books on other fields of knowledge.

The Children's Culture Department at the Ministry of Information and Culture published during November and December 1986 and January 1987 seven new books in addition to their weekly and monthly publications. The latest publications are two pictorials; one on science fiction and the other is a translation of Japanese folk tales by Farooq Saloom.

The Magic Bird is another story book by the Department. It is an interesting Baghdadi folk tale edited by the well-known Iraqi writer Khudhayir Abdul Amir. *Debdub's Adventure* by Ibrahim al-Basri, is about a teddy bear experiencing minor injuries. It teaches children with illustrations how injuries happen and what to do when, for example, bleeding occurs.

By the end of 1986, Iraqi universities have published 66 theses and dissertations, 18 on science and agriculture, 12 on administration and economics, 12 on medicine, 5 on law and politics, 11 on art and humanities, 5 on religion and 3 on engineering.

In a bid to further promote printing and publishing in Iraq the National House for Distribution and Advertising will hold next March one of the biggest book fairs ever held in Iraq. Thousands of books are to be put on display and dozens of printing houses will take part in this exhibition, which is going to be called "The Grand East Exhibition."

Cultural Evenings at the Writers' Union

The Iraqi Writers' Union holds various cultural activities throughout the year. One of the interesting activities is the Wednesday literary evening during which a well-known literary figure is invited to give a lecture on a certain topic and a discussion usually follows.

During November 1986 three such literary evenings were held. The first was on "Separatism in the Orientalist Movement" by Dr. Muhsin Al-Musawi. The lecturer defined orientalism and explained that orientalism was approached for the sake of gaining knowledge and revealing the cultures of the Orient. Dr. Al-Musawi warned there were some people who took the guise of orientalists and began to spread distorted information concerning the traditions and cultures of the Orient and in particular the Arab culture.

On November 12, 1986, Dr. Ali Kamal, a psychologist, talked about dreams and innovation and how an innovator can make use of his dreams in his work.

On the same evening, Sa'doon Al-Ubaidi, actor and stage director gave a lecture on pantomime, an art still new in Iraq. After the lecture, a short play was performed.

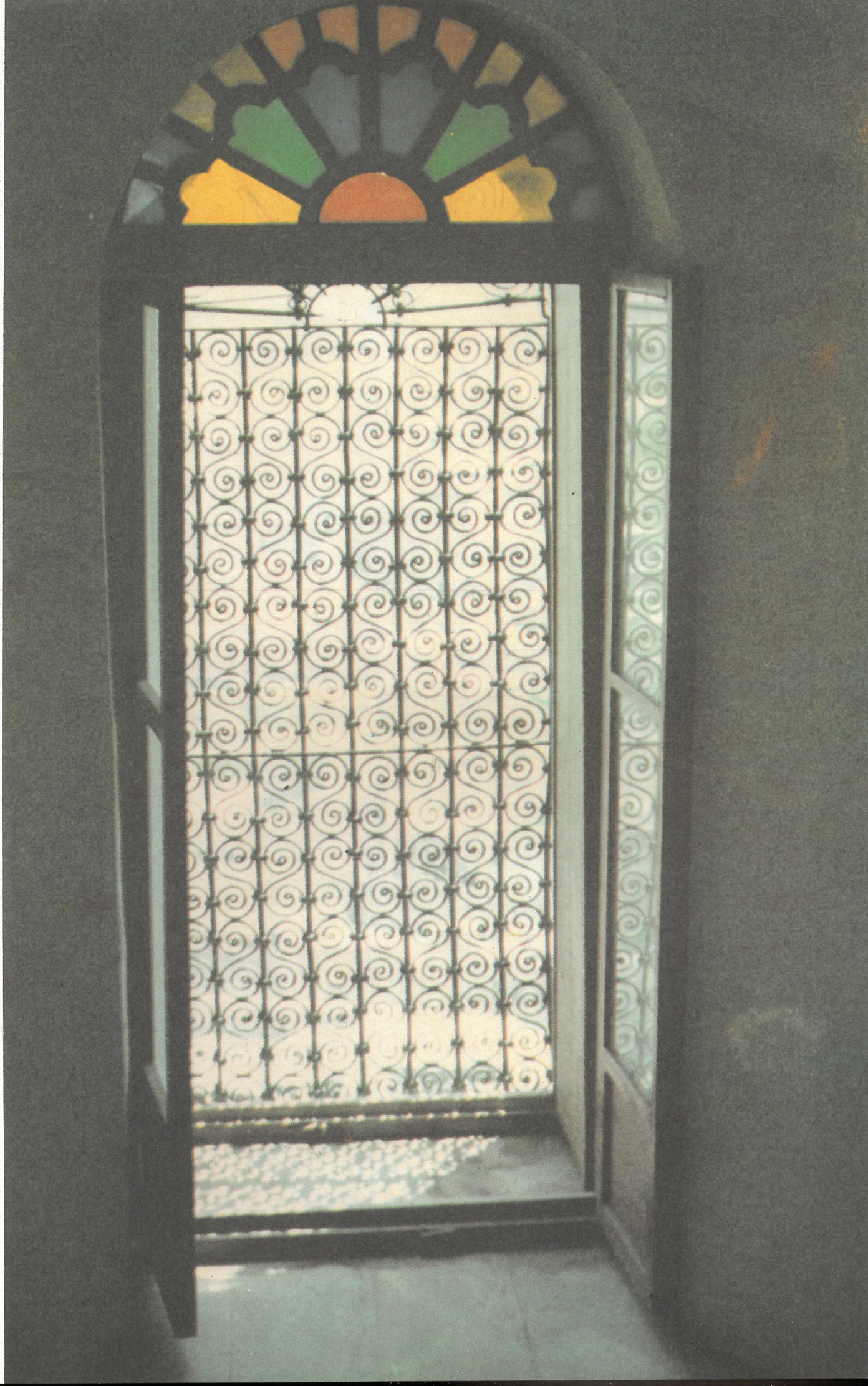
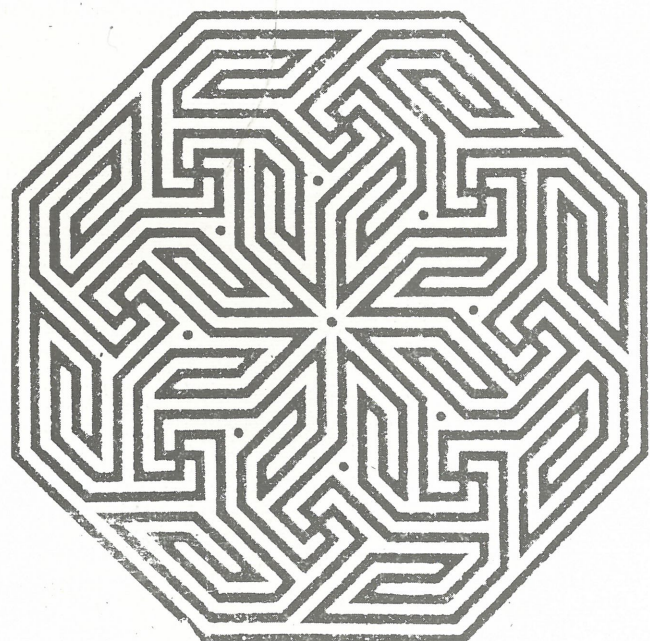
Music critic Hamid Yassin talked on November 19, about the development of musical composition in general.

On December 3, Kadhum Sa'adedin spoke about *Juha*, the Arab joker. By giving examples from folk tales of other nations Sa'adedin maintained that though similar characters existed in the folk tales of other nations they were all derived from Juha's tricks and jokes. Geofu exists in Italian folk tales, Nasr-el-Din exists in Turkish folk tales and there are many other names all over the world.

On December 10, Dr. Ali Ja'far Al-Allaq talked about patterns of perception in Modern Arab Poetry. He dealt with the subject in general and cited examples from poems of Abdul Wahab Al-Bayati and others. The lecturer wanted to ascertain the fact that each poet has his own characteristics.

On December 17, story critic Shuja' Al-Ani gave a lecture on structuralism and its applications in modern Arabic literary criticism. He argued whether the Arab critic was able to apply an structuralist method to literary works. He also talked about the critic's ability to distinguish between an innovative work of art and a fake one.

The 1987 cultural season started on January 14 with a study on "Modern Spanish Poetry" presented by Dr. Luz Garcia Constantino. She also read several Spanish poems which were translated into Arabic.





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A Journal of Modern Iraqi Arts

2_1987

